University of Alberta

Stories to live by: Book conversations as spaces for attending to children's lives in school

by

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Abstract

As I began this study, I imagined creating a transformative space, through conversations around children's literature, where young students and I might attend to stories of our lives, as we are in relation with one another. My research became a narrative inquiry into ways four primary aged children at an urban multicultural elementary school were composing their stories to live by through lunchtime book conversations and other conversations from September 2002 to June 2004. The dissertation provides narrative accounts of the four children, Bob, Julie, Fareda, and James, which show how the children were making sense of who they were and who they were becoming, and how they were also being shaped by school stories being told of them. Methodological and ethical concerns are woven into the discussion of the research in my letters from the field.

As the children's stories to live by bumped against school stories of them, tensions became apparent. I attended to these tensions and how they unfolded using the three dimensional narrative inquiry space. Sometimes these tensions interrupted a child's stories to live by. I reflected on how these moments of tension provoked a reconsideration of my responsibilities as a researcher and teacher, and how they caused me to retell some of my own stories. In the final chapter, I considered the effect this research has had on me as a beginning teacher educator, as I carry the faces and voices of these four children into my work with preservice teachers. I am beginning to understand teacher education as a space to create conversations with preservice teachers that engage them in composing shifting stories to live by as teachers alongside children in schools.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the four children who took part in the lunchtime book conversations and many others conversations with me at Ravine Elementary School, and whose stories, unfolding over nearly two years, helped me understand more about what it means to be a teacher and researcher. Fareda, Bob, Julie and James, thank you for letting me live alongside you in those moments, as you engaged in the ongoing work of imagining and re-imagining your stories to live by.

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Chapter 1: Awakening to Stories On and Off the School Landscape

My 1984 Story of Anne, The New Teacher[1]

The late afternoon sun glinted on the wings of the small plane that brought me to the tiny fly-in community of Willow Lake, in northern Saskatchewan. As I disembarked with my husband, I looked around at the children who had come to the airstrip to see the new teachers. Smiling faces, friendly welcoming words, helpful hands that carried some of our luggage the short distance to the teacherage, a house provided for teachers by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. Our adventure had begun.

Having grown up in rural Nova Scotia, it was quite a change for me to begin my teaching career in this Dene community, far from home. It was exciting to be moving to a place so different from any I had known, and a little scary. I took a book of my mother's with me, an old familiar book of short stories by various authors. I had several boxes of books, but this one had a particular purpose. When I was feeling lonesome for my family and home, I took out this book and read it for the hundredth time. The stories were so familiar that there was nothing to think too hard about, but I put that book to good use that first year away from home. It reminded me of home, of where I had come from. And Jeff and I had each other for support, which was a great comfort.

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[1] There is much that could be said about the northern Canadian context of my first teaching position, in an isolated community that could only be reached by plane. Willow Lake was established by the government in the 1970's in an attempt to change the way of life of the Dene people who had lived in this area for so long, who traditionally followed the caribou and did not settle in one spot. I am not the first to consider the ways in which my role as teacher in that community implicated me as colonizer. However, this complex and fascinating northern context is not my research focus. Rather, I begin my proposal with this story because it speaks of an experience I had as a teacher that causes me to think about the ways in which the narratives of experience we bring to school as children and teachers can be devalued and silenced. This was the case for Calvin, as I, his new teacher, did not understand all that he knew and the value of that knowing.

The school was a rambling, low, white building right beside the lake. In addition, there were several portables scattered throughout the community. I was thrilled to begin setting up my first classroom, at the east end of the main school. I had many ideas about how to make this classroom an inviting, stimulating learning environment; they involved a lot of laminating and cutting, as I created beautiful displays. The principal stopped in and told me things were looking good!

When the first day of school arrived, I was ready. The 22 children in my Grade 2 class were eager to begin working, eager to start some of the engaging, interactive learning activities I had organized. This was so much fun! Things were going very nicely, and then Calvin arrived.

My 1984 Story of Calvin

A little boy name Calvin walked hesitantly into my Grade 2 classroom a few days after school started. He looked too small to be there, but his name was on my register. He wore a faded, not very clean plaid shirt with the buttons done up wrong, and a pair of very worn little jeans. Calvin's long hair wreathed his head in tangled disarray, framing a small, sombre face from which big shining eyes gazed up at me as I smiled and introduced myself. Calvin did not say anything as I led him to the seat in the middle row of the classroom which I had assigned to him. As we continued the math lesson, Calvin sat, stiff and silent, staring out the window.

This proposal is about how I might heed the words and actions of children who, like Calvin, bring stories of their lives to schools.

Calvin continued to arrive at school at unpredictable times over the next few weeks. He would come in and sit quietly, not participating in class at all. I soon discovered from the other children and from other teachers that Calvin lived on the edge of town in a tiny house with his grandfather, and that he was behind his classmates in school. While fluent in Dene, his first language, Calvin did not speak much English at all. And English was, of course, the language of instruction in schools. I tried to involve Calvin in class activities, to have him take part in the lessons that I worked so hard to prepare. He remained silent and uninvolved. I placed simple worksheets that I thought he could complete on his desk, so that he could work on these while the rest of the class was busily engaged at centres or in other activities. He left them untouched. I spoke kindly to Calvin, encouraging him to complete at least one worksheet. He would occasionally take a pencil and scribble on the page.

One day in early October, Calvin sat at his desk as usual, silently staring out the window. It was nearly lunchtime and I approached his desk, quietly asking him to do just a little work before the bell rang. He suddenly erupted out of his desk, yelling in Dene, and ran to the back of the classroom, where he began beating on the wall in unrestrained fury. I ran to the back and tried to calm him, speaking my English words that I hoped were soothing. This seemed to make things worse, and Calvin began to cry, great, hoarse sobs tearing from his throat. I reached for Calvin to try to comfort him. He twisted away from me and tore from the classroom. He did not return during that school year.

Sometimes I would see him in his yard, as my husband and I went for walks around the community that fall and winter. I would smile and wave; Calvin would gaze at me with those solemn eyes, unsmiling and silent. I wondered what had gone wrong. Why hadn't things worked out for Calvin in my class?

My 1984 Story of the Principal

The principal of Willow Lake School, Robert, was an Irish fellow in his mid-40s. He was very supportive of his staff and often encouraged us not to work too hard. A major focus for Robert was on the extracurricular, and he sought out funding for school trips, programs, and equipment. Robert did not involve himself directly in what went on in our classrooms; occasionally he would poke his head in and say things were looking good. I was very pleased when Robert told me that my classroom was beautiful just before school began.

When Calvin arrived in my classroom, Robert told me that Calvin had never had consistent school attendance, and that I shouldn't worry myself too much about that. Increasing overall attendance was an important goal of Robert's, but he did not feel the prospects were good in Calvin's case. Calvin lived with his grandfather, who, according to Robert, did not care whether Calvin went to school or not. After Calvin left the classroom for the last time, in such an unhappy state, I went to Robert and shared my concerns about the situation. Robert was consoling. "It doesn't matter. He's not going to stay in school anyway. It doesn't matter. Come have a drink!"

My 2002 Story of Calvin

I sit at the dining room table, reading over the words I have just typed on my laptop computer about Calvin and those first months of my life as a teacher. I know my own children will be home from school shortly, and their stories and questions will mean the end of my writing day. I both welcome and regret the release. I am troubled by the memories of what happened with Calvin; there is something lingering there, something that I need to think more about. I stretch my arms and flex my fingers; I still have half an hour to write.

Why is this story of Calvin with me after such a long time? Why can I still see his face and picture the day he left my classroom so clearly? I lived in northern Saskatchewan for eight years after that fall and gradually learned something of life in a Dene community, about the context from which Calvin came to school. When winter arrived and the lakes were frozen, some of the Dene families, Calvin's included, left the small community on the southeastern side of the large lake and travelled by snowmobile or sometimes dogsled to their trapline cabins to the north. The teachers of our school took turns weekly going up to the trapline to visit and teach, which was a great learning experience for teachers. On the trapline, families lived in small cabins and trapped and hunted, as the Dene people had done for countless years in this area. There were clusters of two or three cabins on the edges of each lake scattered throughout the region, just south of the tree line. The children found it funny to see us out of our usual school context, and families were unfailingly welcoming. My friends and the children I knew talked about feeling happier and at home when they were up on the trapline. There was usually enough food and always work to do, as the caribou and smaller animals were used in a wide variety of ways. Calvin came to school from a home life that prepared him well for trapping, hunting, mending a skidoo, living on the land with independence and ingenuity.

In telling this story of my encounter with Calvin, I am reminded of Paley's (1979/1989) book White Teacher, *in which she describes her early teaching years in a Chicago preschool. She writes of her colour-blindness toward her African-American students and her discomfort in talking about culture and race. As a beginning teacher in a Dene community in northern Saskatchewan, I too tried at first to ignore the cultural experiences of the children in my class. In time, I gradually learned to welcome and attend to those experiences more fully, although I am surely still learning. I continue to ponder the many possible readings of this story of Calvin.*[2]

What happened when Calvin came to school from this story of a life lived on the land? How did his story bump up against the story of school that I knew, as a beginning teacher who had done well in school and in my teacher education program? As a 22-year-old white, middle class woman,[3] I brought my own vision of what school was into that classroom, my love of books, my desire to be seen as an innovative, dedicated teacher. I brought my deference to authority, which put me in sync with the principal's story of school. I brought my teacher training, which told me that I was doing a good job; I was providing a creative learning environment in my classroom, providing opportunities for choice and lots of positive reinforcement. I was doing things right. But Calvin had left and he wasn't coming back. I had done my best to reach him, hadn't I? The principal said so, and I believed him, mostly. Yet, I had a small, persistent feeling in the pit of my stomach that something was wrong.

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[2] In this chapter, my stories and the ways I am thinking about them currently are in regular font. In italics, interspersed throughout, are the conversations I have begun with other researchers who have written in related areas.

[3] Use of the terms race, class, and gender may serve to explain the experience that I am describing here. I am, however, not so much attempting to *explain* my brief relationship with Calvin, or my stance as a beginning teacher, but to *explore* the experience, to hold it up to the light and examine the puzzles it evokes for me, as I consider how I might find ways to be more attentive to children's narratives of experience. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind me, it is the people, rather than the formal categories, that are important in a narrative inquiry.

There's the door. Erin and Thomas are home from school. I will return to Calvin tomorrow. It's time to hear about today's stories of school. How would I feel if my children experienced school in the way that Calvin did, I wonder as I save my story and turn off the computer.

In Narrative Inquiry *(2000), Clandinin and Connelly describe place, time, and the personal/social as the dimensions of the metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. In my narrative beginnings, I am discovering that one of the places that is central for me is the school and landscape of Willow Lake and the two other small northern communities where I lived for the first eight years of my teaching life. Memories of these places form strong strands of "the web of memories and ideas that create [my] identity" (Silko, 1996, p. 43). As I tell and retell my stories of my early teaching years, I realize that, as Silko says, "[My] sense of identity [is] intimately linked with the surrounding terrain" (p. 43) of those years. As I retell this story of my first year as a teacher, I realize how the landscape, the people, the school of Willow Lake were not yet part of that web of memories and ideas that help me tell about who I imagine myself to* *be. It is only in looking back now, through that temporal web, that I can tell the story in this way.*

Neumann (1997) suggests "stories are what we feel and tell ourselves, about how we know our pasts, even in the contexts of our present-day lives. We…tell these stories—of our selves and our pasts, with words and without—to others in our lives" (p. 109). I am retelling a story that is partly Calvin's story, a story that he told me without words, a story that I sensed without realizing, for many years. "We can sense another's life without acknowledging or appreciating the meaning and value and feeling of what we are learning" (p. 109). Although the story I tell of Calvin has been with me since my first year of teaching, I am only now beginning to be awake to the ways this story can help me learn.

Whose Stories Are Attended to in School?

As a new teacher in 1984, I brought my own image of school with me, intact, from my 21 years of life as the eldest daughter of a farmer and a music teacher in a small community of Nova Scotia. I had the support of my husband, my books that reminded me of home, the echoes of my teacher education program, telling me that I was doing a fine job as a new teacher, the approval of my principal, and my own desire to be a good teacher. These were some of the stories I brought to school in Willow Lake. Calvin brought his stories of travelling up and down the lake with his hunter/trapper grandfather, of listening to his grandfather and friends talking in Dene around the campfire on winter caribou-hunting excursions, of a life lived largely out of doors. What happened when

Calvin bumped up against the story of school that I brought to the classroom? There was, I think, a moment of possibility when Calvin came through the door of the Grade 2 class. In that moment, could I have helped to find a space for Calvin in school; a space in which I might have begun to attend to his narratives of experience and to understand the funds of knowledge (Moll, Gonzalez, & Amanti, 1997) that he brought to school?[4]

I wonder whose stories were being attended to in my story of Calvin in 1984. The principal was sympathetic to my concerns about what had happened when Calvin left the classroom. He made me feel that I was not to blame and that I had done everything right. I was comforted by his assurances and continued on in my position as Grade 2 teacher, feeling increasingly at home as the year went on. Yet, whispering in my head, a voice asked, "And what about Calvin?" Calvin was gone, with no place on the school landscape for the rest of that year. Calvin was gone; no one attended to his experiences in school.

Teachers assume their roles within school systems which are limited by the existing social architecture of the school (Cuban, 1984). As a new teacher, I began to fit my story within the acceptable range of the story of school in Willow Lake. Unfortunately, my teacher education program had set me up for this, as "teacher education based on categorizing and generalizing about others reinforces social tendencies to…view school essentially as an agency of assimilation" (Florio-Ruane, 2001, p. 148). Learning about diversity in my teacher education program had consisted

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[4] This paragraph could lead into a discussion of issues of power and authority in schools, particularly as these issues are underpinned by cultural and political dimensions. I recognize the usefulness of such a discussion, but I am choosing, in this narrative inquiry, to focus on people and relationships as "embodiments of lived stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 43), rather than as exemplars of certain theoretical frameworks.

of studying the various labels that might be given to children who did not succeed in school. As well, there was a linear developmental theory of learning that was considered to be THE way that children learned. In the eight years that I taught in northern Saskatchewan, I gradually learned to become more critical of this assimilationist view of school, and to resist the story of school that limited my role to that of accomplice in the goal of replication of dominant society's grand narrative. However, in that first few months of teaching, it was all too easy to fall into line with this script of school.

Moments of Possibility

Calvin was gone from the school landscape. Something was very wrong, that a child could be gone from school, with not even a whisper of protest or concern from anyone. Was there a moment, a space that opened briefly the day that Calvin entered the school, when things might have been different, when there could have been an opening for Calvin in that classroom? I wonder about that moment of possibility, as it exists for Calvin and for other children as they come to school from the midst of their lives.[5]

Florio-Ruane (2001) finds that the story told by "an omniscient narrator describ[ing] the movement of the student between separate, unquestioned worlds" (p. 39) is common and accepted in North American education. "Like the bed of Procrustus, which occupants were stretched or cut to fit, school is entered, not made, by its

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[5] I am not trying to simplify complex issues by making this statement. I do realize the pervasiveness of race, class, and culture intimately woven into how I, as teacher, perceive each child who comes into my classroom. I do not imagine that I am asking a simple question here, nor that there is an easy answer. I am attempting to phrase this wonder without the use of structuring frameworks of terms such as those above,

occupants, and it is students who must be changed to fit" (p. 39). Calvin would not be stretched to fit, and therefore had to leave. There was no question that his home world must remain separate; there was no place for it on the school landscape.

In telling this story of Calvin, I continue my quest "to understand and articulate...why I taught in the ways I did" (Gomez, 1999, p. 85). By reorganizing my experiences in new ways, I can "make my life history unstable. Simultaneously, I [can] craft new meanings for who I [have] been and who I [am] becoming with the understandings available to me [18 years] after I taught in [Willow Lake]" (p. 85). In writing about my experiences as a beginning teacher, I find ways to reconsider my pedagogy and myself. This is important for me because, as a teacher educator, this is a journey I ask prospective teachers to embark upon. As Gomez says, "I hope and plan for opportunities to tell our stories in the service of creating a more just world for all people...to reconsider who [we are] and how [we] came to be so"(p. 87). In a similar vein, Vinz (1997) writes about dis-positioning ourselves, about being willing to give up present understandings "to make gaps and spaces through which to (re)member ourselves as we examine the principles behind our practices" (p. 139).

I realize the centrality of the term "identity" in my research puzzle. Who I am, or who I imagine myself to be, may be revealed in the stories I am telling here.[6] Connelly

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because, as a beginning narrative inquirer, I am trying to learn from that particular experience of my encounter with Calvin.

[6] Florio-Ruane (2001) discusses the importance of "trying to understand and describe others' lives while acknowledging how we inevitably do this in ways mediated by our own autobiographies" (p. 4). She finds that without an examination of our own and others' experiences in a particular area, for example, racism, it is difficult to come to a deeper cultural understanding. One purpose for me in pondering these stories is to consider how my multiple selves mediate the experiences of which I write.

and Clandinin (1999) use the term "stories to live by" (p. 95) as they discuss identities from a narrative point of view. Identities are

> narrative constructions that take shape as life unfolds and that may, as narrative constructions are wont to do, solidify into a fixed entity…or they may continue to grow and change. They may even be, indeed, almost certainly are, multiple depending on the life situations in which one finds oneself. (p. 95)

I think it is important to be awake to the possibilities for growth and change that are present in my life, and to work to compose and recompose my stories to live by in an ongoing and reflective manner, as the words of Gomez (1999) and Vinz (1997) remind me. It is with this aim in mind that I am retelling my stories here.

I now place a story of myself as a 10-year-old girl alongside this story of Calvin, and consider how I struggled to find a place to live my story in school. As the following section will describe, like Calvin, I found a way to make my situation more bearable. Unlike Calvin, I remained in the classroom, my actions seemingly invisible to most of those around me.

Awakening to Childhood Stories on the School Landscape

My 1971 Story of Anne, A Grade 5 Girl

Growing up on a farm in northwestern Nova Scotia, one of my favorite places was the haymow, up among the huge rafters of the barn, where the hay was stored, loose in those days, to feed the cattle and horses throughout the winter. The dusty haymow was full of nooks and crannies, swallows' and chickens' nests, and occasionally baby kittens.

I played house and hide and seek in the haymow with my four younger sisters. Once I fell down the old wooden ladder up to the haymow and injured my foot. The haymow was one of our best places to play, with minimal adult supervision; grownups hardly ever came up there.

Bateson (2000) says that we all need to "conserve the freedom to experiment and play" (p. 247) throughout our lives. This links for me with what Lugones (1987) writes about play, and how her understanding of play is so different from that of the dead white males whose canons we read. By coincidence, Lugones and I had been reading the same part of Gadamer's (1975) book, Truth and Method, *the part about play. Gadamer seems to conceive of play in terms of the kinds of games, such as soccer, in which there are set rules, and winners and losers. I had been really struggling to find any resonance between Gadamer's ideas of play and mine, with little success. It was wonderful to read that Lugones felt the same way. "I discovered, to my amazement, that what I thought about play and playfulness, if they (Gadamer and Huizinga) were right, was absolutely wrong" (Lugones, p. 14).*

In contrast to the rule-bound, serious business of play that Gadamer (1975) ponders, the kind of play that Lugones (1987) and Bateson (2000) refer to is a kind of creative, imaginative play that lures me to come join in. An example from my childhood would be playing in the haymow with my sisters, exploring and open to surprise, finding a hen's egg and marvelling at its warmth. The openness that this playful attitude involves seems to me to be the kind of attitude that opens us to increasing understanding of our worlds. "The playful attitude involves openness to surprise...openness to self-

construction or reconstruction" (Lugones, p. 17). Playfulness, for me, relates to the kind of learning that Gomez (1999) refers to as she mentions making one's life history unstable in order to imagine new meanings for one's self. Vinz (1997) implies a similar stance in her words about dis-positioning our selves, so that we make spaces through which to see our selves in a new light. As a beginning narrative inquirer, I return to the playful attitude I felt as a child, to the openness to reconstruction that I now see as holding possibilities for deeper understandings of my own subjectivity and of the stories of children and teachers in school.

School life stood in stark contrast to my life on the farm. What I experienced as play was not on the agenda there. There was a one-room school about a mile up the road in Lakelands that my sisters and I attended until the end of Grade 4. There were about 20 students, two outhouses, wooden desks in rows, and lots of worksheets. We had the same teacher from Kindergarten to Grade 4, and she kept us all in line with a very firm hand. By the time I left that school, I had a clear picture of my expected role as good, quiet student. Silence and colouring in the lines met with approval; neat work and compliance were the marks of a good student.

When I was 10 years old, I left my family each morning to catch the bus to the town of Paterson, where I would begin Grade 5 in the big school. I sat huddled on a corner of a seat on the bus as all around me other children laughed and talked; they all seemed to know one another and to be perfectly at home as they helped each other with homework and sang songs. I didn't know anyone on this bus, and when I got to school, there was one boy in my class who was from the country school. The rest of the children were strangers to me.

The Grade 5 teacher was Mrs. Carroll, the principal of the elementary school, a slim woman in her 50s, with tightly curled hair and a very white face. Whenever she came near me, I could smell her coffee and cigarette breath. Her thin lips rarely smiled, and she often yelled. One morning early in the fall, a boy named Jack was late for school and she called him to the front of the room and strapped him, her lips pressed together so tightly as she put all her strength behind each whack of the strap. Jack's arms were thin, and his hand, held still in Mrs. Carroll's, looked so small. Later, it was remembered that Jack had brought a note from his mother, earlier in the week, stating that he would have to be late for school for several days. He had burned his foot and needed to go to the hospital to have it dressed each morning. There was no apology by the teacher. Mrs. Carroll's classroom was a place where things like that could happen, I was discovering.

I sat quietly at my desk each day, and did my work, like the good girl I had learned to be in the one-room school. I was a small, dark-haired child, and I felt that if I could make myself so small and quiet, I would almost be invisible. I rarely spoke in the classroom, and Mrs. Carroll spent much of her time either in the office or at her desk, calling up those who were having trouble with their work. I did well in my schoolwork, and almost never attracted her attention.

One day, I forgot to do my spelling homework. When I realized this in school the next morning, I was terrified. What would happen to me? To my amazement, Mrs. Carroll didn't even notice, and nothing happened. I began neglecting my homework in various subjects, and found that it made no difference. What a discovery! I gradually stopped doing my homework altogether, and life carried on as usual in the classroom. I still did well on tests, and while Mrs. Carroll checked some people's homework regularly, she never asked to see mine. After a few months, I decided to take out my textbook during a geography test and copy the answers right off the page. Mrs. Carroll was oblivious to this as well. I cheated on tests repeatedly after that, in Grade 5, and was never noticed. It was not that I needed to cheat to do well on the tests; I could have answered the questions without copying from the book. Something else was happening as I opened my textbook during tests and stopped doing my homework.

What happened in that Grade 5 year, both within me and in the classroom? How did I end up living such an unlikely story?

My 2002 Story of Anne, A Grade 5 Girl

I wonder, as I sit here typing the words of this story on my laptop, whether I should tell this story. There are several reasons not to tell it; perhaps I sound like an odd child, perhaps my mother will be upset when she reads this, perhaps I don't want my own children to read this. Yet the story lingers with me, just as Calvin's has. I get up, go for a glass of water in the kitchen, and consider: will I erase this story? It is difficult to tell a story about myself, a story of a hard time in my life. It would be so much easier to portray myself as the hard-working young teacher in the story of Calvin, and leave it at that. What is it that this story speaks to, that makes it so compelling to me?

I return to the computer, and re-read my story. The line "I would almost be invisible" seems to pop out at me. I still have that feeling sometimes, that I am invisible in situations where I feel small and insignificant. Mrs. Carroll must have looked at me, in that large class with many struggling students from a wide range of backgrounds, and thought to herself, "I have my hands full with these children this year. Thank goodness I have this one little girl who is such a model student. That Anne! I never have to worry about her!" No matter what I did in Grade 5, from neglecting my homework to cheating on tests, Mrs. Carroll did not notice. Or if she did notice, my behaviou was so far outside her story of me that she did not attend in a way that allowed her to change her story of who I was. I was a good girl, in her mind, and good girls don't cheat. My story, given to me by the school and the teacher, did not include any antics like that.

The thing is, that wasn't my story. I was assigned that part, but it wasn't really who I was. I was a girl who had adventures in the barn and the woods around my farm, who liked to climb trees and ride my bike. I was the girl who stayed very still when a frog jumped on my knee as I waded in the brook below the farm, so I could watch it for a long time. I was a girl who could run faster than anyone else in the one-room school in Lakelands, and who would sit on a little bench and watch my father milk the cows, laughing when he squirted some milk into the mouth of Sammie, the barn cat. I was the oldest of five girls, and sure of my status as big sister at home. I was not the voiceless, compliant model student of Mrs. Carroll's class… was I?

The classroom was not a place in which I could be who I imagined myself to be, as a 10-year-old girl. Instead, I was pressed into, and outwardly accepted, the role of good student, good girl.[7] I did not totally lose sight of the other dimensions of Anne the 10-year-old. I still played with my sisters at home in our familiar places and was a daredevil on my bike. The contrasts between the school Anne and the home Anne made for a tension that would continue for many years in my life. Grade 5 was the only year that I cheated on tests and didn't do my homework, however. What happened when I was in Grade 5 to cause me to act his way?

I learn more about what it means to be engaged in narrative inquiry. In telling this story of myself as a Grade 5 girl, I realize how I am "complicit in the world [I] study" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 61). My uncertainty about whether to tell this story highlights the multiple ways in which who I understand myself to be are integral to my research puzzle. "This confronting of ourselves in our narrative past makes us vulnerable as inquirers because it makes secret stories public" (p. 62). This vulnerability is worth it for me, I think, because it carries the promise of a fuller knowing of my own subjectivity. This is an important aspect of the research I propose, one as tantalizing to me as my desire to "offer up research understandings that could lead to a better world" (p. 61).

Working in this narrative inquiry space is not without its price. I struggle to regain a narrative coherence in my life-story (Carr, 1986) as I tell the stories of Calvin and of myself, because with the retellings have come questions that cause me to wonder

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[7] My acceptance of this role was predicated by the social and cultural milieu in which I grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, as a child of Irish Catholic descent in rural Nova Scotia, whose parents were both from well-respected families in the area. I knew that I was expected to behave properly and not to cause a stir. Above all, I was taught to obey and please those in authority. While I suppose I had the option not to live

about that coherence. As Gomez (1999) reminds me, it is in making my life-story unstable that I become open to creating new meanings for who I am and who I am becoming. Mishler (1999), in a discussion of identity formation, refers to "the non-unitary nature of the self that emphasizes the multiplicity of life stories, the cultural "master" narratives they appropriate and resist, and the effects of the contexts in which they are produced"(p. 154). Mishler raises the question of "the 'fit' between different tellings of one's life" (p. 154), which is a question that intrigues me, as I write about my 10-year-old self as living different stories. I was, simultaneously, the model student, the girl who cheated on tests and didn't do her homework, the girl who played in the haymow, the big sister, the oldest daughter, and perhaps other selves as well.

Perhaps I won't erase this story, at least not yet. As I think about my own daughter, Erin, who is nine years old and a very good student at school, I wonder if she feels the role to be an uncomfortable fit, one that she has been assigned, not the one she might have chosen for herself. I wonder how many children come to school to find their roles ready-made, their own stories of who they are ignored by the story of school. As Mishler (1999) might ask, how many children do not find a good fit between the different tellings of their lives? It's time to turn off my computer for the day; I don't know how to turn off the questions that are troubling me.

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up to the expectations of my cultural background, I did conform, at least outwardly. As this story illustrates, I did not inwardly conform, as I continued to see myself as multiply defined.

Living on the Storied Landscape of Schools

Despite the outward signs I displayed in the classroom, I did not feel that school was a welcoming place to be. I was afraid of the outbursts of anger that Mrs. Carroll indulged in, uninspired by the tedious seatwork, and increasingly ambivalent about the role I seemed to be pressed into (and outwardly accepted) of good girl and model student. I knew that events like Jack's strapping were wrong, yet I felt powerless to stop or change them. I did not perceive myself as having any choice about my role in the relentless proceedings of the story of school. This perception itself was perhaps an embodied[8] choice I made to appear to conform outwardly to the social expectations of school and the rural Maritime cultural setting in which I grew up. Had I gone to my parents and spoken to them about my unhappiness with the situation, what might have happened? I find it difficult to imagine, because I simply was not aware of having the choice of taking such action as a 10-year-old.

Are there similarities between my story of myself as a Grade 5 girl and the story I told of Calvin and my first year as a teacher? I think about how Calvin had come to school with his stories of a life lived on the land, of caribou hunting trips and ice-fishing. I too came to school as a child with my stories of life, of haymows and forests to play in, of animals to care for, of sisters to share adventures with. Calvin bumped up against a story of school that had no room for his story. I bumped up against a story of school that would accept me only on its own terms. Calvin found that the only way to create a space for himself was by leaving the school landscape. Maybe I found a space for myself by having a secret life, a small, invisible resistance to my assigned role as good girl, in the story of school.

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[8] In using the term embodied here, I mean to imply that tacit sense our bodies have of knowing the story we are to live. I was not so much making a decision to live in this way in school as following the embodied knowing in which I had been steeped all my life.

Thinking back to my research puzzle, as I had begun to consider it after the story of Calvin, I am reminded of my question about whose stories are attended to in school. Calvin met up with the story of school that was firmly in place in Willow Lake. As a 10-year-old, I too found a story of school that had no room for negotiation. No one attended to Calvin's stories in school. In Mrs. Carroll's class, I did not find a space in which to bring my story to school. In both cases, the story of school was not in question. Both Calvin and Anne were supposed to fit into the plotline of school, and when we did not, we each struggled to find some way to make sense of our lives in school, Calvin by leaving, and Anne by trying to subvert the plotline of good girl.

Could things have been different for me in Grade 5? Was there a moment of possibility, as I began that school year in a new place, when a space might have opened up for me in that classroom? For Calvin, the space wasn't there when he encountered the story of school. His new teacher, who was I, did not understand how to attend to his narratives of experience. Calvin did not sense any possibility for that space to be there, and he left. When I met up with the story of school, as a Grade 5 girl, I too sensed no space for my story of who I imagined myself to be. My choices, as I perceived them as a 10-year-old, were to make myself fit into the role I was given, or to resist covertly and whisper "I am not like this. I am not a meek and compliant model student," but to appear to fit in anyway. Outright defiance of the powerful story of school was not an option I would have imagined. I resisted, in a quiet, almost invisible way, by not doing my homework, by cheating on tests. I stayed in school, unlike Calvin, but I resisted.[9] As I recollect Mrs. Carroll's actions, I suspect it probably never occurred to her that there was anything to worry about regarding my days and months in her classroom. She never wondered, "What about Anne?" because to her, there was nothing to wonder about. My role as good girl was a perfect fit, in her eyes.

What do I mean by the phrase "the story of school"? I use this term to represent the grand narrative of the school system in North America, the often un-voiced, but nonetheless powerful, expectations that shape how teachers and students act on the professional knowledge landscape of schools. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) refer to "the professional knowledge landscape" (p. 2) as "narratively constructed, as having a history with moral, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions" (p. 2). Understanding the school as a professional knowledge landscape allows us "to enter a place of story" (p. 2) and to examine the story of school within this storied context. The stories of teachers and students are scripted according to what is deemed acceptable on this landscape.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) suggest that even when we do dare to live stories that are in resistance to the story of school, we do so covertly. "When teachers move out of their classrooms onto the out-of-classroom place on the landscape, they often live and

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[9] Calvin was a child of Dene ancestry, and I was a child of Irish Canadian background. I was a member of the dominant sociocultural group in Canada as I grew up, and was without doubt in a more privileged position as a student than Calvin. Calvin, as a member of an Aboriginal group in an isolated location in northern Canada, had far more reason to feel that school was not attempting to understand his narratives of experience than I had. I do not imagine that my struggles were identical to his. Yet, I do draw a comparison between our experiences, in that we both found ourselves unable to bring our stories of our lives into the classroom.

tell cover stories, stories in which they portray themselves as experts, certain characters whose teacher stories fit within the acceptable range of the story of school being lived by the school" (p. 25). As I quietly resisted my role in the story of school as a 10-year-old, I continued to live the cover story of good girl. In Willow Lake, I buried my unease at Calvin's abrupt departure from school and went with the cover story, that his leaving was inevitable, not my fault. This allowed me to fit within what was acceptable in the story of school in Willow Lake.

As I again pick up my research puzzle, I think about how many other children are staying, even though they have bumped up against an immovable story of school. How many children are staying but resisting, in small but important ways? What does this resistance mean to their sense of who they are? I wonder also about how the story of school carries on, relentless, despite the many children it marginalizes, the many children who bump up against this story and have to figure out how to cope with it. How can I, as a teacher, become awake to the stories children bring to school? It is so easy to be comfortable in my story of school, so certain; how can I wake up to notice children bumping into this story, in which I am so enmeshed that I don't even see it? Do other teachers share these questions?

Although I did not articulate my questions in this way until very recently, these stories have been with me for many years. A small voice sometimes whispered in my head, wondering if school could have been a space for me, a space for Calvin, a space in which we might have begun to build a relationship. In my years of teaching since that first one with Calvin, I found that reading children's literature aloud to a class is often a way for me to begin to develop a relationship with children. As a substitute teacher for the past several years, in a new community, I have needed to find ways to create spaces of comfort with classes of children over and over again. Books have provided a way to begin that process, to help us begin, together. I felt that if I could just make children comfortable by reading books with them, they could get on with the business of learning, which is what we were there for…wasn't it?

In 2000, I began a research project as part of a master's degree in education. Because reading and discussing children's literature with children has been a central part of my teaching, I wanted to make book talks the focus of my research. I entered the research site, a Grade 2 classroom, with a literacy focus. I went into the classroom expecting to gather data that would help me learn more about how book talks could be a way of making things comfortable for children, so that they might develop their critical thinking skills and interpretive abilities. As I began to write my thesis, a few months later, I was troubled to find that this was not really what I wanted to write about at all.

Awakening to Children's Stories During Book Talks

My 2000 Story of Book Talks

It may not have been my favourite book, but the second grade class at Appleton Elementary School loved it. *Erin's Voyage* (Frank, 1994), a tale of a young girl who finds a very old doll in the attic at her grandfather's house, had everyone talking. As I glanced around the classroom, I saw groups of four or five children deep in animated discussion, sitting or kneeling in small clusters on the shiny white floor of the new school. I was nervous, wanting things to go well in this second week of my time with this class. Just as I had begun my research project, there had been a move to a brand new school, at the end of September. The teacher had not yet had time to put down a rug for a cozy reading area or to think about creating nooks for groups to gather as they worked on such interactive activities as the book talks that I was facilitating as a researcher from the nearby university.

Nonetheless, these 7-year-olds were intent on the conversations in which they were engaged. The lack of rugs and cozy places did not seem to bother them. I wandered from group to group, as did Jan, the classroom teacher, listening and sometimes adding a comment. I had thought that this book might not be well received, as the illustrations were dreamy and misty, not very substantial, and the plot was rather unusual, involving a trip back through time for Erin, as she looked for the original owner of the doll she had found. I was much mistaken about the reception of this book by the second graders. They seemed delighted with its aura of uncertainty, as evidenced by their animated conversations. Several of the groups were focused on the question of whether Erin's mysterious midnight voyage back through time to return the doll to its owner was a dream or whether it could really have happened. In one group, the discussion turned to the possibility that a greater being could have had a hand in the events of the story.

Jason: I'm wondering who was the girl on the ship.

Maria: It could have been just like this ghost that God sent down to get like…Maybe like the doll is some kind of idol up there.

Cameron: Or maybe it was like an antique that was really old…

> Bob: Um, maybe that doll was really God's doll.
>
> Cameron: Yeah, that's what my question was, Bob, so don't copy off me.
>
> Bob: That was probably God's doll, because God was probably just stopping and um, he probably just went in another town…like looking for someone else.
>
> Cameron: And maybe he got trapped inside the doll or something. Maybe that could happen. (Murray Orr, 2001)

I was amazed to hear this taped conversation, as I transcribed tapes later at home on my computer. I knew the children had enjoyed the book and the chance to discuss their thoughts about it, but I had no idea that they were thinking about topics like this! Why did these children branch out into such philosophical musings? What was at work in the book talks that allowed space for this far-ranging dialogue to occur?

Just a few days after I read *Erin's Voyage* (Frank, 1994) to the children, another event happened that helped illuminate for me the direction in which I was headed in my understanding of the book talks. We had just read *Abel's Moon* (Hughes, 1999). The father in this book has to go to work away from home for several weeks at a time, and his young family misses him very much. They plan to make a moon machine from an upside-down table and boxes in the yard, to go to visit their dad. After reading this book, Peggy told her small group of her dad's more permanent departure. The children huddled in closer to Peggy in the circle, and another little girl touched her arm. One boy said that his father had gone away once, and he had to stay with his grandparents. Another child said her father goes away sometimes. I happened to be with that group just then, and I could feel the closeness, the comfort that was being shared among the children.

As the days of my research project slipped by, I gradually came to realize that it was not so much the literacy gains made by the children that intrigued me. Rather, it was the ways they came together in their groups to talk and share ideas, the ways they stretched and grew, together yet apart, that fascinated me.

Maxine Greene (1995) wrote that "Individual identity takes form in the contexts of relationship and dialogue; our concern must be to create the kinds of contexts that nurture—for all children—the sense of worthiness and agency" (p. 14). So when I am part of a classroom, it is my concern to create contexts that nurture, and to seek out spaces in which children can learn. This is a complex task because in finding these spaces, one plotline does not work for all. A nurturing context will mean something unique to each child, based on his or her narratives of experience. I begin to see that I can only understand what contexts that nurture might look like from the perspective of each child's own individual evolving identity. That leads me into another story.

My 2002 Story of Book Talks

Here I sit at my dining room table again, feeling tired and uninspired. It is mid-afternoon on a grey Monday; I look out the window at the brown grass on the lawn. It's a late spring, and there are few indications of warmer days to come. Decidedly uninspiring weather. And yet, if I look closely, I can see little blades of green grass poking through the dead thatch of last year's lawn. Hmm. A sign of hope, a sign of renewal.

In that second grade classroom, the book talks provided hopeful signs for me, as I completed my master's research. Looking back, I begin to realize that the book talks held moments of possibility, moments in which children could take a risk and talk about connections to their personal lives, and in which children could respond to one another in caring ways. It seemed to me that book talks held the possibility of encouraging caring relationships among us. This was not at all what I had expected to be writing a master's thesis about; it meant that things were much messier than I had wanted. Literacy strategies are relatively safe, suitable for writing a thesis about. Relationships with one another in the classroom are not. And yet, I wanted to understand more about this aspect of life in schools.

When I remember Peggy's story, I know and un-know (Vinz, 1997) the ways that schools can be different, can be places where relationships with one another are really valued, and where our teaching can begin to make a difference in children's lives, in our lives. Maxine Greene (1994) says "It is a matter of helping change the practices, doing something to mend the ragged edges" (p. 18). I wonder about my part in mending the ragged edges. The metaphor of ragged edges reminds me of a blanket, carried around and loved by a small child, worn and frayed. Can I explore the blanket, ragged edges and all? Or is it too fragile? Will it fall apart if I hold it too close?

I did not end up where I expected to in my master's research. I ended up with the tentative sense that caring relationships and moral education were important in my understanding of the classroom. I knew that I was moving away from asking questions about ways to improve literacy in classrooms.[10] My focus was changing. I felt that I was in a transition period of my life as I struggled to account for the fact that my thoughts, questions, and feelings kept surfacing in my field notes. I had wanted this to be about the children and their voices as literacy learners. Why couldn't I just do that? I knew, as I finished my master's thesis, entitled *Facilitating Caring Relationships in a Grade Two Classroom* (2001), that I had unearthed more wonders than I had resolved.

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[10] My definition of literacy was perhaps a narrow one, in that I did not, at that time, consider how critical literacy struggles with some of the same questions that I began to ask. These are questions about how our relationships in schools might be something other than a reflection and reproduction of North American

A year later I was deciding on a major change in my life, committing to a move across the country with family in tow to begin a doctoral program. At the same time as my more public life was in upheaval, I was also in the midst of inner turbulence. As I completed my master's thesis, my safe story of school from a research perspective came under my somewhat reluctant scrutiny. I began to realize that who I am is intimately tied up in the research I do, just as my experiences as a teacher are inextricably linked with the experiences of the children in the classroom. I cannot be involved in book talks in a classroom without facing some tough questions about myself (or selves) as a researcher, a teacher, a parent, a daughter, and yes, a 10-year-old girl, although I did my best to ignore this quandary as I wrote my master's thesis in 2001. In some ways, the 10-year-old girl who was me, cheating on her tests in Grade 5, bears some resemblance to my self as the teacher writing her master's thesis and trying hard to pretend that it wasn't in part about my own learning. In both cases I was living a cover story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), actively fitting myself into the role I imagined I should fill. How difficult it is to step back and take a look at those cover stories and accept my own un-knowing and not-

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society, based on dominant ideology. Banks (1993), for example, uses the term "transformative texts" (p. 7), to argue for a curriculum that "challenges mainstream academic knowledge and expands and substantially revises established canons, paradigms, theories, explanations, and research methods" (p. 7).

knowing (Vinz, 1997), to reconsider my stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), to live with the uncertainty.

For the past few years, as I have read and studied as a doctoral student, I have tried, without meaning to, to turn my face away from this dawning realization, to find a place for myself as a researcher within the grand narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that allows me to distance myself from my participation in a classroom. Perhaps a critical stance, a sociocultural perspective, a feminist standpoint… and yet, as soon as I step back to see the classroom through a particular lens or lenses, I lose something. I lose some of the uncertainty and the questions that puzzle me. When I attempt to frame that experience within a particular structure, I lose aspects of the experience that keep it vivid. How can I find my way as a researcher and still keep the experiences in the classroom close up and part of my figuring out and questioning of my own narrative?[11]

As I search for a way to be awake as a researcher, I find that the research puzzle has evolved for me, to embrace my growing wonder about how I can be awake as a teacher, to become aware of the experiences of children like Calvin, the stories that children bring to school. How can I wake myself up to notice the stories of a 10-year-old girl, as she quietly bumps up against the story of school, in which I drift along like Mrs. Carroll, perhaps unaware of the bumps?

When I use the term "awake," I am thinking of a wide-awakeness in the sense that Greene (1978) makes of it. Greene considers wide-awakeness a "heightened

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[11] This paragraph traces my path toward my decision to work as a narrative inquirer. For me, the possibilities of understanding experience through narrative inquiry are exciting and multiple.

consciousness and reflectiveness...meaningful only with respect to human projects" (p. 163). One's wide-awakeness remains grounded in the intersubjective world, and in one's relations with others. Greene argues that the inclusion of the arts and humanities in the curriculum of schools is of critical importance because works of art provoke a reflectiveness, and enable people to pay "full attention to life" (p. 163). Greene is calling on educators to include a diversity of literature and works of art in the curriculum, to make possible for each student "new continuities, new openings, as we move towards our own moments of being, our own shocks of awareness" (p. 196), as we work on the ongoing project of the creation of our selves. With this awakening in mind, I think about swimming against the current of the story of school, finding a shoal of sand, perhaps provided by a piece of literature we read, on which to stand and observe the tide swirling around us. Where can we find the strength to stand, or turn and move against the force of the current?

The story of school is often like a strong current that carries us. We don't even have to notice that we are being swept along, and sometimes it's rather comforting to be carried so surely and certainly. In my first year of teaching, in Willow Lake, I was comforted by the certainty of the story of school that was embodied in my principal's words, my teacher education, and my own schooling experiences. Not everyone moves with the current of the story of school; there are surely those who swim upstream. Perhaps these people are awake to the urgings of the current, and have found ways to resist its power. How hard it is to struggle and swim against that current, or even to sense that it is there, controlling us! I have been a teacher for 18 years now, and for most of that time, I have felt vaguely that something was not right, that Calvin could be gone from the school landscape without a sound. Children continue to bump up against the story of school, as I did at the age of 10, and perhaps find themselves "stretched or cut to fit" (Florio-Ruane, 2001, p. 39) into that story, or attempt to resist in some way, but still ultimately have their role determined by that story. Just as teachers may be caught up in the current of the story of school, so, too, the child who enters school is stepping into a powerful, seemingly inescapable story.

The aquatic image of currents that I use in the previous paragraph is one that is personally meaningful to me. I grew up along the shores of the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia, where the tides rise and fall over 100 metres every 12 hours. There are very strong currents in the harbour near my home, and as children we were warned emphatically of the power of the tides and the currents that lurked beneath the surface, capable of carrying us out to sea or down into the depths. I have memories of scurrying in from the mud flats, as the tide rushed in not far behind my sisters and me, an inexorable, potentially deadly, but utterly inescapable force. Is this too strong an image to represent the power of the story of school that holds us in thrall? I think, for me, it is not, else why would the task of awakening to hear other stories be so difficult?

How do I awaken to hear the stories that children bring to school? Anna Neumann (1997) is a scholar whose parents lived with the unimaginable burdens of stories from the Holocaust, which were told partially in words, by her father, but largely without words, by both parents. The stories were told nonetheless, in and through the silences, to their daughter Anna, who was intent on constructing a story of her parents.

This story was composed not only from "selected fragments of text" (p. 95), but from thoughts that arose in watching her mother and father over the years, in their everyday lives. Neumann was impelled to "chase after the ghosts, and shells, and splinters of her [mother's] stories" (p. 95) because she loved her and wanted to know her story. This, to me, speaks to the intensity of relationship that inspires the kind of research to which I am drawn. It speaks to the idea that research and life are one and the same in narrative inquiry, and to the possibilities for living one's life with narrative coherence if one chooses, if one is awake to the stories others bring to our lives.

My Research Puzzle: Book Conversations as Moments of Possibility

These stories bring me to the articulation of my research puzzle, which involves the work and play (Lugones, 1987) of creating spaces for children to tell and retell their stories to live by (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This study points toward the need for such spaces in schools and offers the possibility of children's literature as a vehicle for creating those spaces.

Galda (1998) suggests that literature offers us both "mirrors and windows" in which to see both our selves and others reflected or retold. It is with such a possibility in mind that I imagine reading Red Parka Mary *(Eyvindson, 1996) with Calvin and the other children in that classroom 18 years ago. Might that text have provided, to some degree, a mirror for Calvin and the other Dene children of that class? And might it have given me, and others, a window into the lives of children in this northern First Nations community? What reflections on my own story to live by might I have glimpsed in the* *mirror as I read and talked with the children? I wonder too whether* Red Parka Mary *might have provided a window for the children to see how I was constructing them by creating that space, by choosing that story. I am beginning to imagine the mirrors and windows metaphor that Galda employs expanding like a fantastic hall of mirrors at an amusement park, so that we tell and retell stories of ourselves and each other not only in the pages of the literature we read but in the texts of our lives, in our conversations and our actions, in ways with words, and ways without words.*

As Maxine Greene (1995) describes, literature may encourage an aesthetic experience, allowing us to make associations between a text and experiences from our own lives. The text may lend us a vantage point from which to recall the shapes of our childhoods. "Vistas are appearing, shapes—yes, and shadows too—are making themselves visible" (p. 76). Greene uses this wording to indicate the shaping memories of our childhoods, the ones that appear unexpectedly, triggered perhaps by a literary experience, as one's "imagination [is] released through the reading" (p. 76). These memories might enable us to see our selves in new ways, to reconsider our identities in new lights, to reimagine our pasts and our narratives of experience. As I reflect on my research puzzle in light of what Greene is saying, I wonder how literature encourages children, in the midst of their experiences, to pause for a moment and see their lives from a slightly different perspective. There would not be the same looking back over time at childhood memories that literature may evoke in adults, but perhaps instead, there is a space to step outside for just a moment and reconsider our narratives, even to ponder our identities in relation to the literature we read. A question this has raised for me is how *conversations beginning around children's literature may provide ways to attend to children's stories of their lives, for those of us who want to awaken to the narratives each child brings to school. If literature opens a space for children's reconsidering of identities, how can we as teachers encourage, understand, be aware of this shift, subtle though it may be, that students are experiencing?*

As I began this study, I imagined, in book conversations, a transformative space where we might move away from the categories that define us, the story of school that circumscribes us, and think about other ways of being. The grace to attend to stories of our lives, as we are in relation with one another, was what I hoped to find in book conversations, in the in-between spaces (Bhabha, 1994). I have attempted to listen for those stories, to encourage the tellings and retellings, and to try to learn from them.

My research site has been a Grade 1/2 classroom, Room 7, at Ravine School, a mid-sized elementary school in western Canada,[12] where I was graciously welcomed by Laura[13] and the 22 students. My research was linked with a larger research program at the school, a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) project headed by Dr. Jean Clandinin, entitled *School Landscapes in Transition: Negotiating*

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[12] Ravine Elementary school is a suburban school in a western Canadian city. The neighbourhood as reported by Statistics Canada (1996) is ethnically diverse with the largest ethnic population represented by individuals of European descent followed by individuals of South Asian, Chinese, Southeast Asian, Filipino and Latin American descent in order of percentage of the community population, with other ethnicities represented. A small percentage of people in the community are of Aboriginal heritage. It is a middle to lower middle class neighbourhood comprised of mostly single family dwellings with an employment rate of 72%. It has many green spaces located adjacent to schools and separate city parks. It is a family community with children 19 years or younger making up 42 % of the community population. The immediate area surrounding Ravine School has a number of multiple family dwellings including rental apartments and townhouses as well as some housing owned by Aboriginal groups (Murphy, 2004).

Narratives of Experience (2001). One focus of this project was to contribute to understandings of cultural diversity in school environments and classrooms. A number of other researchers and I were involved in work at Ravine Elementary as part of this project. They included Jean Clandinin, Shaun Murphy, Marni Pearce, and Vera Caine.

I spent Wednesday mornings at the school in May and June of 2002, reading with small groups of children, assisting Laura in various classroom activities, and beginning to know the children, the staff, and the school a little bit. The younger children in this Grade 1/2 class returned to Room 7 again in the fall as Grade 2 students, and there were also nine new Grade 1 students entering Room 7 in the fall.

From September to December 2002, I was in Laura's classroom three or four mornings a week. In addition, from November 4 until December 11, 2002, four students and I participated in a lunchtime book group, reading children's literature and talking about these stories and our own stories. After Christmas, I moved across the country and began a new career as a teacher educator at a small university in eastern Canada. I continued to return to the school and the children, from May 6 to May 23 and then again in June 2003. In the following school year (2003-2004), I returned for a week in November 2003 and for a week in April 2004. Each time I returned, I shared my writing about each of the children with them individually, as well as bringing more books to read with them. I was involved with these children from May 2002 until April 2004, a period of almost two years.

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[13] The names of the teachers, principal, students and the school itself have been changed to provide anonymity to participants.

The four children from Laura's class who became members of the lunchtime book group, and who also became central to my study, were Bob, Julie, Fareda, and James. In this dissertation, I have included four chapters about some of the things I learned alongside each of these four children. Before these four chapters comes chapter 2, "Letters from the Field," which follows my journey from the first negotiations around finding a research site to the end of my study at Ravine School, two years later. The letters are written to my partner, Jeff, a teacher educator, who was living and working across the country from me during much of this time. Because we have been teachers in the same school at times over our careers, and because we share a passion to rethink education and how we live in schools, it seemed appropriate to write these letters to him. The letters tell about not only events as they unfolded in my research, but also about my questions, wonders, and feelings over this time.

Some of the threads from this chapter will be pulled through the next one, threads of knowing and un-knowing (Vinz, 1997), of uncertainty and of the struggle to awaken (Greene, 1978) to the stories children bring to school. In this study, I found myself re-searching my own stories to live by (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) even as I awakened to the children's composing of their stories to live by. The children's literature we shared provided the opening of a space for the children and I to play (Lugones, 1987) with the composing of identities, and our continuing relationships over the two years allowed that space to grow and flourish.

Chapter 2: Letters from the Field

June 19, 2002

Dear Jeff,

How are things in Nova Scotia? I can hardly believe that the spring is almost over, and I will soon be seeing you there. I have lots to tell you about my first visits to my research site, Ravine School. After some negotiating, I think I am all set to be alongside a teacher named Laura in a Grade 1/2 classroom there. I know this might surprise you, since I have talked with you about being in a three/four classroom, but things did not work out in that regard. None of the three/four teachers felt they wanted to be involved in this project, each for different reasons.

Back in early May, when I talked with Angela, one of the three/four teachers, and she told me that none of them wanted to work with me, I was very disappointed. I had an image in my head of what I would be doing, and then I had to let it go. It has taken some time. It took me a week or so to be ready to go back to the school and try another approach. I had to restory what I would be doing in this doctoral research, and even though the shift was slight, moving from a three/four class to a one/two class, my image had been disrupted and I needed to regain a sense of coherence. I wanted to work with a Grade 3/4 group because I was interested in what children of those ages (eight or nine years old) might be thinking and talking about in conversations around books we might read together. I worked with a Grade 2 group in my master's research and thought I would like to explore books and lives alongside some slightly older children now. As I thought about it, however, I realized that the younger group, the one/two class, would still be fascinating and would be thinking about many unexpected things. They would make me think in new ways about lives in school, and that really is what I am about with this.

Laura was a teacher who came to our initial meeting to talk with teachers interested in having one of us (Marni, Shaun, or me) in their classroom next year. I decided to go to her classroom, and ask her if she was still interested. I was so anxious as I walked down the hall to her door on May 13, I had to force myself along. I felt like running away. I experienced such a strong sense of uncertainty as I made this move toward negotiating possible entry into Laura's classroom, the first step of negotiating a relationship with Laura. I thought she might say no too. After all, she came to that first meeting, and then no one approached her right away. How might she be feeling about this research project?

Laura smiled and graciously agreed to consider having me in her classroom next next year. The very tentative opening negotiations we had begun happened satisfactorily. year. I was so pleased about this! I felt as though I now have a home, a school home, for As I write this, it has been more than a month that I have been visiting Laura's classroom every Wednesday morning and coming to know some of the children. I am starting to realize that our first meeting was just the beginning of the negotiations in which Laura and I will engage. Although I know I will be based in Laura's classroom, there are still so many questions, big and small, ahead. Which children will I work with in the lunchtime book group I am planning? How will I work alongside Laura in the classroom? How will Laura and I share our thoughts about the research?

It has been wonderful getting to know the children in Laura's class. There is Ricky, so quiet and shy, Jeff, who loves to draw, Bob, who is so funny and often in the thick of any situation that arises. There is Fareda, who sometimes says a bit in Urdu, her family's first language, to her friend Jade, who also speaks Urdu at home. They smile and exchange a few words now and then. There is Cara, so independent and sure, and Rosie, who is so enthusiastic, but who seems to have sad moments. There is Rhonda, who made a tail for herself out of a shoelace, and has prowled around the playground as a cougar the last few days. Something about that really makes me want to know her better, but she is going into the third grade, so I won't see her in Laura's class next year.

Laura asked me to read a chapter or two of *Ramona the Pest* (Cleary, 1992) with a group of five children whenever I am there. They are all Grade 2 children so will not be in this class next year. These children are not very interested in the book. I think they would like picture books more. At first, I persevered and read the assigned chapter to children who were rolling on the floor, drifting off to the bathroom, and falling asleep. This situation caused me to reawaken to my stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) as a teacher, and I found myself using little bits from the book to branch off into stories that involved the children more. For example, one day, the three billy goats gruff were mentioned in *Ramona the Pest*. I closed the book, and told the story of the three billy goats gruff, while the students acted out the roles. This was more like it!

Laura has had an ongoing project happening in the classroom over May and June. The children were each given a caterpillar, in a little container, back in May. They observed their caterpillars and wrote about them. As each of the caterpillars formed a cocoon, Laura helped the children place them in one of the two butterfly houses on a table at the back of the classroom. These are big, with glass walls, perfect for us to watch as the cocoons gradually opened and butterflies emerged. Today we took the butterflies outside and let them go beside the flower garden outside the front doors of the school. It has been a project by which I and many of the students have been fascinated. There was magic in that moment when we let the butterflies go. They flew in many different directions, and some flew off immediately. Others settled on a bush in the garden or in a tree nearby. A few seemed to cling to the small boxes in which they were carried outside. We watched in awe as these fragile creatures began to explore their world. I feel that in this few weeks at Ravine School, I, like the butterflies, have begun a wonderful journey. Who knows where these butterflies will go, and how many will survive this tentative beginning? I am not sure of all the answers, nor even all the questions, that will arise in my research study, but like the butterflies, I have made a small beginning.

Talk to you again soon!

Love, Anne

September 1, 2002

Dear Jeff,

It's been a week since I left you and Thomas in Nova Scotia. Erin and I are settling in here on our own, but it seems odd without you. I have been out to Ravine School three days already. These have been administrative days during which to prepare for that momentous first day of school. In the mornings, I have been joining the staff meetings, which have covered a range of topics from the school's goals in the area of writing to a review of the Ravine School handbook. We read a bit of Lucy Calkins' book, *Living Between the Lines* (1991), and did a little writing ourselves. Wow! Jeanette is amazing, an administrator who is passionate about what is really happening in classrooms, about the learning possibilities for each child.

In the afternoons, I've been doing whatever tasks needed to be done in Laura's classroom, such as cutting and stapling papers into small books, laminating nametags, arranging books on shelves, and more. I felt quite excited to be in on this part of the school year here, and yet, at the same time, small things reminded me I am not really a teacher here at all. On Thursday, as I pasted and cut in one room, the Grade 1/2 teachers were meeting next door. I wondered what they were talking about, and felt distinctly the differentiation in our roles. I am a teacher, yet I was not there in that meeting. I miss that comfortable role of classroom teacher, and I am struggling a bit to figure out who I am at this school. I am not here as a teacher, not here as a parent. What does it mean to be a researcher here? Despite being in a school, the kind of place I know well, I am uncertain about how to live in the midst in this new way. My body knows the rhythms of school life so well. I know how to sit and stand and move as a teacher, how to sit cross-legged in a circle on the carpet, kneel on one knee beside a table full of children, and walk through a room where students are sprawled on the floor in pairs and small groups, reading and writing and drawing. Now I wonder, how will I *be* as a researcher here? I want to stand alongside the teacher and children, but I am unsure about how I will move into this position, how I will position myself physically in order to live metaphorically alongside students and the teacher.

I took Erin with me to school for those administrative days, since her school had not yet begun, and I had nowhere else for her to stay. She also wanted to see where I would be spending my days this year, and I wanted her to have an image in her head of my school. Marni brought her daughter, Joanna, too and they played together. While I was glad to have Erin with me, I was also aware that her presence underlined the ambiguous nature of my position. None of the teachers brought their children. Here I was, feeling caught between worlds, my parent position foregrounded, in a place where I felt like a teacher, but was not. Was it all right for me, as researcher, to bring my daughter? What are the plotlines for teachers in this story of school? I feel like I need to imagine a new plotline for myself as a researcher. What bits, as Bateson (1989) might say, do I draw on to improvise a life as a researcher here at Ravine School? Erin and Joanna played in the pit near the library while we attended the morning staff meetings both days. Erin came over to my table for a hug and reassurance that I was still close by every now and then. I wondered what the teachers and teacher assistants around me were thinking when she popped into the library. I imagined their surprise, seeing Erin and Joanna. What kind of researchers are these, I imagined them thinking. I was thinking the same thoughts. Who am I in this space? Who do these teachers think I am?

More from me soon, Jeff. Good night.

Love, Anne

September 3, 2002

Dear Jeff,

Today was the first day of school at last! After dropping Erin off for her first day at her school, I arrived at Ravine School just in time for *O Canada*. The halls were crowded with parents and children and strollers. Caron, the school secretary, was in the halls, inviting parents into the library for coffee. As I entered the classroom, there were a few parents in the room along with the children. I noticed Eli's mother, and Chandra's grandmother, and I think it was Bob's dad, as well as Anil's mother. I knew some of the parents from last spring, others I just guessed about, because they were beside their children. These parents gradually made their way to the door. Bob was cheerful and talkative, as was Jeff. Ricky smiled and said hello. Fareda looks older and more relaxed. I spoke to several of the children I knew from last year and their parents. This was fun! I felt like I was connecting; I knew this way of being with students and parents.

I did not notice whether the parents just left the classroom on their own, or if Laura suggested this would be a good time for a coffee in the library. After taking attendance, Laura introduced me to the class as Mrs. Orr. I smiled and said hello, but at the same time, a thought was flickering through my head. I wonder if I should have asked her to call me Anne. I am not a teacher; do I need to be called Mrs. Orr? I had not thought about this until she said it. Several hands went into the air, and Bruce, Bob, Jeff, and Neil talked about remembering me from last year. Bruce said I used to go with him to the library to read, and Laura praised him for remembering me.

A little later in the morning, I went to the staff room to get a soup ladle for Laura, and saw a little girl crying in the hallway on my way back. It was Sherry, the twin sister of Jayne, a girl in Laura's class. She said she couldn't find her classroom. I asked her who her teacher was, but I couldn't make out what she answered. We walked past the Grade 1/2 classroom doors, and Gale, another Grade 1/2 teacher, came out to see us. When she asked Sherry who her teacher was, Sherry said Mr. Sheridan, so Gloria took her to Jim's classroom. I felt so sorry for Sherry. What a bad feeling to be lost on the first day of school! I was feeling just slightly lost too. Excited to be here, enjoying seeing the children I know from last spring, but a little lost. The embodied knowledge I have as a teacher comes seeping through in my actions and my thoughts. My body knows what to do as a teacher. I moved around the classroom, knowing the place (so familiar from classrooms where I have lived before), but not knowing quite where to stand or sit, not wanting to be in Laura's way, wanting to be alongside the child who looks sad, anticipating story time, wishing I could read the story…I am not the teacher here. Who am I on this landscape? What story am I living here?

At recess, I went outside with the children. Laura was on supervision, and she brought vegetable sticks out for a snack, and shared them with me. Students had snacks outside too, and most were playing quietly. I was on the other side on the playground, far from the new play park, which probably was not quiet at all. I saw Rhonda and Jenny from Laura's class last year, and they waved as they ran by. A few children came up and gave Laura hugs. No hugs for me, I was an unknown person, not a teacher, not a student teacher, not a teacher assistant. Questions assailed me. Who am I at Ravine School, in a yet-to-be imagined plotline? Will I be able to come to know some of these children in any kind of depth? Will I find a place for me in this school?

The strangest part of all today was leaving the school at noon. Teachers don't do that! I am going to be there three or four mornings a week. It was so odd to walk out the front doors at noon, to leave the school halfway through the day! Can I really do this? Shouldn't I be here all day? I am so uncertain about how to live as researcher at Ravine School; I have such a story of myself as teacher, and that story does not yet seem to fit well with who I am here on this school landscape. I have a sense of being on the threshold, of hovering between the teacher plotline I know so well and other, blurrier, less-defined storylines. This is a new step in my becoming, and I am not certain about where it will lead.

I hope all is well with you there.

Love, Anne

September 12, 2002

Dear Jeff,

It's been just over two weeks since I began at the school here, as a researcher in the Grade 1/2 classroom, alongside Laura, the classroom teacher, and 23 amazing 6- and 7-year-olds. It has been a strange feeling to be in a school, in a classroom, and yet not to be in the familiar place of teacher. The first days of school were busy and I filled many pages in my blue notebook, writing myself cryptic notes during class that I would later expand upon in the evening at home, on my computer. The Grade 2 children remembered me from the spring, and I am getting to know some of them better. The Grade 1 students are finding the full days at school quite long, after half days last year. Several children asked me what I am writing in my notebook. Julie, in Grade 1, was first to ask. Fareda, a Grade 2 girl, was impressed with how quickly I was writing. I told her she would write this fast, too, someday; it just takes practice.

I try not to sit at the back and take notes all day in school. There are some moments, like when Laura reads the Morning Message with the class, that I do have to sit there quietly. But when there are activities going on, I am trying to be a part of them as much as possible. I scribble my notes on the run, between encouraging students who are writing stories, tying shoelaces, helping make little mice out of clay, and more. There have been a few moments of tension, when I wondered if I might be overstepping some kind of invisible boundaries. For example, when a couple of children asked me if they could use the washroom (this is a class where you must ask first), I said yes, only realizing after the fact that perhaps Laura would rather I not take that responsibility. I will have to ask her about that.

I am not the teacher, and yet I do feel like one. I am struck again by the somewhat uncomfortable sense that being here at the school draws forth a kind of response from me, from my body, and yet what it is calling forth doesn't quite fit, because I am not living a plotline as a teacher here. The things I want to do are not quite the right things…I am in an in-between space. I wonder if or how this space is related to the kind of in-between spaces I talked about in connection with the book conversations I plan to have with children in Laura's class. In talking with you, I recall speaking of these spaces as ones where we might imagine other stories to live by. Isn't that just what I am trying to do myself, as I enter this classroom and school as a researcher?

During the first week of school, Laura gave me some class time to explain to the children about my presence and my research. I wanted to be as open as possible with them, and yet I was a little unsure about how to make the reasons for my presence clear. I explained that while I am usually a teacher like Miss Green, this year I was getting to do something really special. I would be here in this school, to spend time in this classroom and other out-of-classroom spaces, to work with the students, to read books together, to talk about books we read, and to get to know them. I held up my blue notebook and told the students I would be carrying it around often, because I wanted to write things in it that would help me remember what we have been doing and talking about. I told the class that eventually I would like to write a book (my dissertation) that would tell other people about our lives in school, reading and talking together. I mentioned I would be letting each person's parents know about my work here, and that I would say more over the next few days.

A couple of parents have asked me if I am a new teaching assistant at the school. I talked with Eli's mother and Rob's mother about my research plans. Rob's mother was very interested in my research and has talked with me about Rob several times. She has been very welcoming, and Laura tells me she volunteers weekly in the classroom. Eli's mother was disappointed to discover that I was a doctoral student beginning a research study. Eli is finding it very hard to say goodbye to her each morning when she drops him off. I think she had hoped I was a teacher assistant and that she could talk with me about this. I tried to tell her I would be glad to sit alongside Eli and help him, but I could feel her kind of close up after I told her I was not a teacher assistant, but from the university. I will try to talk with her again. I have been watching Eli and feeling such angst for him as he suffers through each morning goodbye. The feeling that I am not perceived as teacher here at Ravine School frustrates me. I want to say to these parents, "But I *am* a teacher, can't you see it in the ways I work with your children? Can't you tell I want to help Eli through these rough mornings? Can't you see I will help Barbie with her shoelaces? Don't you see my teacher ways of knowing shining through?" This is hard, Jeff. This space that I find myself in is not yet a comfortable place to be.

At recess yesterday, I wandered through the staff room, but didn't stay. Not many people were in there. I came back to the classroom, and sat and ate my carrots and read a book from the shelf. I do not feel a part of the school here. I don't know people, children or adults, very well. I do feel like an outsider…I am trying to remember how I gradually came to feel more at home at the various schools where I have taught. But this is something different, and I don't have anything to fall back on, in terms of experience. I am not a teacher, I am a narrative inquirer at this school. I guess I was a researcher at the school where I did my master's research too, but that was different. I had been a teacher there, so I had another way of knowing the children and the teachers. I am so new and so unknown here.

A few days ago, there was an evening Parent Meeting at the school. As part of the program, Laura and I had decided I would talk to parents about what I was doing in the school and classroom. About 12 parents attended the meeting. After I explained my study and what my presence in the classroom would involve (participating in classroom life, reading books and talking with children), Tim's mother asked me if I would be writing a book about this. I said I would eventually be writing my dissertation, and possibly publishing articles or a book. She replied she hoped I would use Tim's real name, as she wanted to be famous! We all laughed about this, but it does make me consider the ethical issues involved in giving parents all the information they need. I mentioned I would send home letters and consent forms, but I do not think I was able to give parents a full sense of the potential reasons for thinking carefully about their children's involvement in this study.

I left that meeting feeling that the parents did not understand all the implications of their children's involvement in the research project. Although I think I said the right words, I felt uneasy standing there, informing parents about my research hopes and plans. I felt as though I should be telling them about the hopes and plans I have for the class, for their children's school year, the kinds of things I would say if I were the teacher. But I am not the teacher, Laura had already taken care of that part of the evening, and I am positioned differently. I am a researcher in this classroom. I feel so unsure about who I am in this classroom, who these parents might imagine me to be. There is a tension emerging here for me, as I begin to acknowledge the embodied knowledge I carry into the classroom as an experienced teacher. I found myself standing where the teacher stands as I addressed these parents, but with other words coming out of my mouth, words about my research plans. Not teacher words. Perhaps I have been trying to talk myself out of this tension I am feeling, positioned in a classroom but not as a teacher, stripped of my familiar plotline. As I write this letter to you, I am aware of the force with which this tension is brewing, just below the surface of my thoughts. I wonder what will happen. Will I find a way to story my place here at Ravine School? Or will I remain in this in-between space?

During the past two weeks, another kind of tension has been felt by everyone on staff at Ravine School. There has been some concern around the enrollment figures. They are lower than expected, which meant the school needed one or two fewer staff members. Jeanette asked if anyone was interested in transferring. No one was. The newest teachers were in danger of losing their jobs, or at best being transferred to other schools in these first weeks of school. Walter, a first-year teacher, was the newest staff member, and Laura was next! This was a time of great anxiety for Laura, not knowing whether she would be here next week or not. I felt so sorry for her, in this tenuous situation.

I have to admit, I did wonder what would become of my research if Laura left and her students were divided up among other rooms, or if another teacher took over her class. I went in each morning holding my breath, as I'm sure Laura must have also done, waiting for the news. Who would leave? After a few days of tension, Jeanette called a staff meeting on September 10 at lunch. We all sat quietly, in marked contrast to the lively, bubbly atmosphere of the staff meetings a few days ago, before school began. Jeanette came into the silent room, and announced only one teacher would be moved. She took this stand because of her firm belief that it would be better for the students, although it means carrying a deficit this year. Jeanette is not afraid to make hard decisions, it seems, when they are in the best interests of students. This means Laura's position is safe for this year, and we both breathe sighs of relief.

Take care, Jeff.

Love, Anne

October 16, 2002

Dear Jeff,

Time is such a funny thing. It seems like so long since I've seen you and Thomas, and yet my days at Ravine School are whizzing by. I am so glad to be part of a research team there. When I drive in and see Marni's van or Shaun's truck in the parking lot, I feel a slight jump of pleasure in my stomach, because I know I will have someone with whom to talk about the week's events. Over in the Kindergarten room, Min Ling has been spending time with Jennifer and the children. Today I saw Vera and Jean walking in the hallway outside the one/two classrooms and smiled, knowing they were here too. It makes such a difference to be able to be in the midst of stories at the school alongside others. These relationships offer windows into what is happening in other parts of the school, in Marni's or Shaun's research, as we talk about our days, and also mirrors in which to see my own presence on the school landscape in new ways, as I hear Shaun's or Marni's stories of becoming as researchers here.

As I recall how Galda (1998) writes about literature offering mirrors and windows through which each of us may be transformed, I realize that I am starting to think about that idea in new ways. My relationships with Marni, Shaun, Jean, Vera, and the others involved in our research study can provide mirrors and windows of understanding. Not only books, but other things such as relationships with other people, other people's stories, can offer possibilities for deepening relational and narrative understandings of our research and our lives. Perhaps the broader meanings of text as implying far more than the written word, intimately linked to our multiple positionings, and the complexities of intertextuality, are what I am grappling with here. We read the texts of the sociocultural framework all around us, so I might say that I read glimpses of the texts of Marni's or Shaun's lives as researchers, seeing windows into theirs and mirrors for mine.

I spend three or four mornings a week at the school, and am feeling much more a part of the classroom, though still on the outside in the staff room. Laura and I improvised a pattern where, during Stations, a time for small group literacy activities, I take one or two groups out of the class to read and talk about a book. I find these times are ones I am coming to treasure, because in those small groups, the children and I can talk and come to know one another better. It has been a bit difficult to find a place to gather with the group, as the library is often busy. I recently found Room 3, the empty classroom, is sometimes available, and it is a good space for our groups.

A few days ago I had a conversation with six children during Stations, as these six were in my assigned group that morning. This experience helped me think about the importance of both the space and the way the children and I are feeling. On this day, as we gathered up books and blankets to take with us, my mind flashed back to a morning earlier in the fall when Laura asked me to work with a group of boys who were most disruptive that day. That morning I felt tense and wondered what I was doing here, as the children rolled around on the library floor, not attending to the book Laura asked me to read with them. As I think about that morning now, I realize I was so anxious to find my place in the classroom that whenever Laura suggested something, I rushed to do it. I struggled with tensions around my embodied sense of being a teacher in this space and my uncertainty about who I *am* in this space, if I am not a teacher. In the midst of experiencing this tension, I accepted and enacted whatever Laura asked of me, perhaps too quickly, in order to create a positive relationship with her and to find a less uncertain space for myself in the classroom. I realized I had to communicate with Laura and make some changes. These negotiations did not, I discovered, cause difficulties in our relationship, and Laura was happy to discuss new ideas about my presence in the classroom.

Last week Laura and I created groups of children we thought would work well together, so these are not just groups thrown together on the spur of the moment. I started taking one group at a time to an out-of-classroom place, during Stations, to read a book that I choose with them. These changes seem to be working and, as a consequence, I was more thoughtful and less rushed and stressed on today than I had been earlier this fall, and I suspect this played a role in how things unfolded.

The book I read today was *Floss*, by Kim Lewis (1992), about a border collie who loves to play ball with children, but who must work hard and become trained as a sheep herding dog. Floss is one of my favourite books about dogs, and I knew this group had several dog-lovers in it. This led me to choose this book for this group. I asked the children who had dogs before we began. Neil said he had two dogs, a white dog and a wiener dog. Something about the way he talked makes me think these are fictional dogs, but I am not sure. He looked around the room and seemed to be searching for ideas as he told us about his dogs. Cara said her mom had had three dogs while she was growing up, but they have all died. Eli said his dad had a dog too. Jeff said he used to have a golden dog, with long ears and long fur. Fareda and Jayne did not say whether they have dogs.

I began to read, and at the end of each page, there were some comments. The first page, before the story begins, shows two sheep and a soccer ball. Fareda said she had a sheep. I asked if she lived on a farm, thinking it was unlikely. She said no, but her family had a sheep in Pakistan when they lived there. This was the first time she or any of the children from Pakistan or India ever referred to their countries of origin. She said they had just one sheep. I would have asked her more, but she spoke very quietly and, I felt, tentatively. I thought if I said too much, or asked her to say too much, it might add to her feelings of vulnerability. I wonder if she remembers being in Pakistan, or does she just know stories of Pakistan passed down at home. I am excited Fareda has begun to talk. One of the reasons I attended so closely to what she said is because she is going to be one of the children in the lunchtime book group. The opening into her stories to live by that Fareda gave here intrigues me. I hope in our lunchtime book group, we will come to know one another better.

The conversation continued, and as the children helped carry blankets and books back to the classroom, I felt a closeness among us, an intimacy that began to sprout tentatively from the shared reading of this book and our talk around it. How things are shifting since the first days of school, when I sometimes worried I would not find ways to live alongside the children in this space! I felt so uncertain about my position in the school and classroom in those first weeks. At last I am feeling a little less uncertain in my days here at Ravine School. I don't feel that I have to be quite so careful, watching Laura so closely to see what the next step is. I am beginning to take some little steps on my own and trust myself again. Perhaps I am creating a story for myself of who I am here in the school, a new story since the plotline of teacher will not quite fit. I definitely don't have it all figured out yet, but there has been movement in several ways. I found a better place for us to go, Room 3, that empty classroom. I'm not sure why I didn't know about this room before. It's kind of bare, but now that we take blankets and pillows, it's really not bad. It is a big improvement over the library, where we could be in the midst of a story or a conversation, and suddenly, a whole class of children could walk in and fill the place with their bodies and their books and their excited whispers. Or Marni might bring a student to the table by the window for a conversation. And whatever our small group was doing would be finished, lost. Room 3 is our own space, at least while we are in it, and that is more important than I realized.

In the classroom, I am also gradually finding a space for myself. Laura and I are getting good at balancing each other. If she is with a small reading group on the carpet, I work alongside the other children at their desks as they write in their journals or respond to a story. If Laura is involved in a whole class activity, and there are some children who are working on something different, like finishing an art or science project, I join them at the side table or on the carpet. During Reading Club, a time for individual or partner reading first thing every morning, I wander the classroom, sitting with children to read or talk about books or other texts. Laura does the administration of the home reading program at this time, and occasionally I do this for her. She knows I treasure this time with children and their books of choice, however, so I usually have the wonderful opportunity to come alongside one or more children at this time. We don't necessarily plan the morning this way. It seems to unfold quite naturally. Things that felt like tensions earlier, like whether or not I could give permission for children to go to the bathroom, seem easier now, as we all, Laura, the children, and I, start to have a story of who I am in the classroom and in the school. I recognize that as things shift and I am able to integrate my embodied knowing as a teacher into my positioning in the classroom and school, I feel less on the edge, less full of uncertainty. I wonder if this is something all narrative inquirers go through as they negotiate a space as researchers in the school.

Also, I am figuring out some things about choosing books for each group, based on coming to know each one a little more each day. Carefully choosing *Floss* (Lewis, 1992) for this group, in which I knew there were several children who liked dogs, is a long way from last spring, when Laura handed me a book to read with a group of students. The book was perhaps connected to the curriculum of the classroom, but did not necessarily have spaces of resonance for the children and me in our small group. Now I choose books that might connect to the curriculum of our lives, as I come to understand more about what that might mean. When I think about our lunchtime group starting soon, I wonder what books will be the ones that will resonate with each of those children, maybe with all of us, in ways that I cannot even imagine at this point. It's exciting to see how these experiences with the Station groups are moving me slowly toward figuring out more about the lunchtime book group and how it may unfold and about children's lives.

I never imagined it would take this long to be ready for the lunchtime group; I guess maybe I thought back during the first days of school that I would just pop into that classroom, have a sign-up list, and start the group. I'd be into the lunchtime book groups by mid-September! This way is slower but I think it's better, because now the children and I know each other, and working with these small groups during Stations has helped me learn some significant things, about place for example, and about feeling comfortable in that place. I will keep learning more, I hope, as we talk and read together. It has been important to experience this negotiating of beginning the lunchtime book club in the midst of lives already being lived fully in school and outside of school. I am learning about the complexities of this negotiation, and the need to work thoughtfully in the implementing of the lunchtime book club.

This week, I spoke with parents of the four children who I hope will be part of the lunchtime book group, to tell them more about the group and to ask for their consent for these children to come to the Thursday noon-hour gatherings. Bob's mother was very pleasant and told me about how she is reading the first *Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1952/1999) book to Bob every night. Julie's mother mentioned how young Julie was (she does not turn six until late February), but was happy to have her come. James's mom was a little surprised, I think because there is already a school story of James having special needs. She was happy for him to be part of the group as long as he wants to be. I went to see Fareda's mother at noon at the school, as she works in the three/four pod at lunchtime, supervising students. Fareda's mother was very pleased to have Fareda in the group. In the back of my mind I remembered Jeanette's warning that Fareda's family might object. I am glad this didn't happen.

You asked me how I ended up with four children in the lunchtime group, from a class of 23. I think any of these children would be fascinating to work with (like Neil, describing his two fictional dogs). Choosing was a hard thing to do. I found, over the course of September and the first half of October, that these four children kept appearing and reappearing all over my field notes. Fareda was so interested in what I was doing, and, just in the last couple of days, she began to tell me bits of stories about her life, centred around her move from Pakistan to Canada two years ago. Bob has such a strong language and knowledge base, and yet is seen as a very mediocre student. These contrasting stories of who he is are fascinating to me, and we seemed drawn to each other. James rolls on the floor, doesn't tie his shoes, can't sit still, and yet he has a wonderful imagination and, like Bob, a wealth of knowledge. Julie caught my attention the first day, with her little black ponytails and her alone-ness. She is so quiet, and has a kind of wisdom about her. I think she is a very special girl. I wonder what each of these children calls out of my narratives of experience.

As you probably remember, I was thinking I would ask all the Grade 2 girls to be in the lunchtime book group. This would have been a nice cohesive, easy to work with group. But as the weeks go by, I realize that these four children, who do not necessarily have a lot in common, as the Grade 2 girls might have, are the ones I find myself in relation with most often in and out of classroom spaces. I am so looking forward to our lunches and conversations together.

This is such a long letter; I have so much to talk with you about! Thanks for being such a good listener.

Love, Anne

November 21, 2002

Dear Jeff,

Well, it's been a month since I wrote to you, and it's been busy here! Erin and I are doing fine, although we miss you lots. It is report card season, and teachers are tired. Not being part of this rite of preparing report cards has been a fresh reminder to me of the different space I occupy on the school landscape at Ravine School, something I hadn't thought about for a while. I remember well the hectic days around report card time in schools where I have taught. Laura is exhausted from late nights filling out report cards, and now there is the Open House, and parent-child-teacher conferences, as well as parent-teacher conferences in some cases. I am trying to help where I can. Today, when James's portfolio fell apart when he dropped it (it *would* be James's), I quickly helped him pick it up before Laura noticed it. It took a good 10 minutes to make sure I had all the pieces back in order.

I want to tell you about the lunchtime book group gatherings. We have them on Thursdays in Jennifer's Kindergarten room. The Kindergarten children leave at 12 noon and there is no afternoon Kindergarten, so Jennifer does not mind us being in her room.

Bob, James, Fareda, and Julie were excited when they found out we would be in that classroom, because they each have memories connected to that room. They point out things to me frequently that remind them of their Kindergarten days. Fareda always goes to touch the framed fabric owl that sits near Jennifer's desk. She says its eyes really moved when she was a student, and it clearly still holds some fascination for her. Bob has told me several times about the bees and other paper insects that hang from the ceiling. His class made them, he says. Julie and James both like the little house in the back of the classroom and usually try to spend some time in there over the lunch hour. Sometimes we go back to Laura's classroom if we need a big open floor area where we can draw on chart paper, because Jennifer's room has carpet and is not good for that.

Over the weeks of our noon book group gatherings, I have tried to bring in children's literature that I think will open up spaces for each of the four children. Each week, I am trying to choose books that one or more children may connect with, as I come to know each one a bit more fully. A couple of weeks ago, we read *Everybody Needs a Rock* (Baylor, 1974). I brought this book because of Bob's intense interest in rocks and his own rock collection. I also brought some of my rocks, gathered by our family along the shores of the Bay of Fundy. Bob loved the shiny purple amethyst and the pyrite that looks so much like gold. After we read the book, he told us about how he would collect rocks from his driveway, and from outer space, and sell them and become a billionaire. Bob's enthusiasm was contagious and soon he and the other three children were busily drawing themselves collecting rocks from all kinds of places, including outer space. James commented that he knew 85,000 places to find rocks. Julie said she would go into a field to find rocks, or she could ask her godmother where to find them. She found her godmother in the woods, Julie informed us. I asked her if this was a fairy godmother, but Julie shook her head. Mysterious comments like this intrigue me, and I wonder what stories may be dancing through this little girl's head.

Each of the children took some of the rocks I had brought and began to draw using the rocks, by some unspoken agreement. "I've got copper…I've got two purple ones…I'm going to draw a little island where I might find one of these…I'm drawing Hawaii…I might try making a map with these…This is a rocket…I'm going to find rocks in outer space…Yeah, and I'll catch some asteroids" (Transcripts, November 7, 2002, p. 30-31). The conversation meandered along, now and then taking surprising turns. In the midst of drawing islands, rockets, planets, and asteroids, Fareda asked me if I have parents. I answered that my mother lives in Nova Scotia and my father died a long time ago. Julie then asked me about my children, whom I have talked about before. I said that my son, Thomas, found the amethyst one day on the beach, and that both my children like to collect rocks. James told us that he would use the green rock ("Look how big it is!" p. 33) to draw some rocks in outer space, and our talk moved back to the work in progress, the pictures the children were drawing on the big white sheets of chart paper.

It seems that our talk weaves back and forth across various times and places, and from the book or activity at hand to wide-ranging topics and back again. And our ideas build upon each other's thoughts and words, as we sit together on the floor or sometimes around the small round table in the Kindergarten classroom. In mid-November, I read *Chrysanthemum* (Henkes, 1996) to a group during Station time in the morning, and Bob and Fareda were in that group. This is a book about the first days of school of a little mouse named Chrysanthemum. At lunchtime, when we went to the Kindergarten classroom for our Thursday book group, the conversation turned to our memories of first days of school. Julie was away that day. Fareda remembered coming to school here when she moved from Pakistan to Canada at the age of five. "I was scared to put my hand up…because I was thinking the teacher can hit me" (Transcripts, November 14, 2002, p. 3). This was not the first time Fareda talked about her memories of school in "my country," as she called it. Fareda said, "I spoke a different language when I came here" (p. 4). "Sign language?" James guessed. Fareda shook her head, and I ventured, "No, a language from Pakistan. Is it called Pakistani, Fareda?" Again, she shook her head. I later found out from her mother that Fareda speaks Urdu at home, one of many languages spoken in Pakistan. Bob asked Fareda if she remembered any words from her "old place" (p. 4) and asked if she could tell us one or two. She taught us how to say "grandmother" in Urdu and told us that the word "cloud" was the same in both languages.

Bob then said that he knew how to say "grandpa" in German and taught us the word "Opa." James spoke up and remembered his first days of school. "[I was] kind of like Fareda, but, I did know the same language. I was very shy and scared" (p. 7). James said there were bullies in his Kindergarten class. This led to a discussion about what to do in an encounter with a bully. "Teach her how to be good" (p. 8). "Tell the teacher" (p. 9). "Bullies are actually cowards" (p. 8). This conversation all took place before I even opened the book I had brought for our lunch group that day. It was, I think, inspired by *Chrysanthemum* (Henkes, 1996), but I am beginning to wonder if the spaces we are creating here in these lunchtime groups are more about attending to the children and their unique and fascinating selves and encouraging them to attend to each other. Sometimes this seems to be as important as the book we read.

Sometimes things do not work out as planned. On November 14, 2002, I brought a book—*Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996)—which I thought Julie might connect with, but she was away from school that day. The others enjoyed reading the book and we had a thoughtful conversation, but in my head I was thinking about Julie and wishing she were there for this. One thing I am finding out, though, is that I have to be ready to improvise (Bateson, 1994) as I live as researcher on the school landscape. In that way, I guess I am living a story that parallels my teacher story. When something unexpected happened when I was a Kindergarten teacher, I changed the plan and adapted. When children at the role play centre began creating impromptu drama based on the story of the three billy goats gruff, for example, and the excitement carried over into other spaces, I postponed the read aloud I had planned for that day and found Paul Galdone's (1981) wonderful version of the story in the library to read instead.

When Julie came to school the next morning, I improvised and found a space to read *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996) with her during Reading Club, a quiet reading time that was part of the daily class schedule. Fareda came alongside us for this reading, and I was so glad we did this, because Julie told me about how much this book reminds her of her grandmother. We have talked about this several times since then.

Today's lunchtime group was a bit of a mess, I'm afraid. Because of parent-child-teacher conferences in Kindergarten, we were not able to use Jennifer's classroom to meet. There was also a group of teachers[14] meeting in Room 3, the empty classroom. I thought it would probably work to go to the office space behind Room 3 (we could go through the computer room and not disturb the teachers in Room 3). It turned out that Julie had forgotten her lunch, so we had to go to the office to call her home first. When we finally got to the office space, we found it was filled with open bins of exciting things like magnets and toys, left there by itinerant teachers using this space. All the children, especially Bob, were fascinated by these items and were busy playing with them. I felt a bit frustrated as it seemed like one thing after another kept us from reading *A Quiet Place* (Wood, 2002), the book I had planned to read today. When I think of it now, it's ironic that the book title referred to the one thing we couldn't seem to find, a quiet place! This was quite a day, and fortunately not every day is like this. I admit that on days like this I have some wonders about what I am doing here and whether we are getting anything out of this.

In the end, after some time to play with the goodies in the office, we went back to Laura's classroom, which was now empty, and read *A Quiet Place* (Wood, 2002) there. Laura was in her office, just off the back of the classroom, and I wondered briefly if she would think I am terribly disorganized, wandering from place to place around the school with these four children. *A Quiet Place* turned out to be a book that really appealed to both Bob's and James's imaginations, as I had thought it might. As we read the page with the desert scene, they talked about how a cactus has spines for protection. Suddenly they were both up and acting out a scene where James was a cactus and Bob became a wild boar, trying to get water from him. This seemed like an expression of their embodied knowledge that Bob and James were enacting, similar to the role play of kindergartners and their three billy goats gruff. I guess, when I think about it, maybe this lunchtime book group was not a total write-off after all.

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[14] This was a meeting of a teacher committee called the Belonging Group. The goal of the group was to create an environment where all children, parents, volunteers, and staff feel that they are important parts of

I miss you, Jeff. Write soon.

Love, Anne

May 14, 2003

Dear Jeff,

When I left to move to Nova Scotia in December, Laura and the children had a little party for me, with snacks and wonderful letters that they had written to me. I left feeling that I was saying a last goodbye, that this was really it. Sure I would be returning for a visit in the spring, but that seemed so far away and things would not be the same. I was leaving to move across the country to take up an academic position, not to return to the familiarity of my own elementary classroom. I left thinking I would have lots of time to write about the things that happened, the things we talked about in Room 7. After all, that's what one does at a university. As we gathered on the carpet meeting area and each person talked about a memory from our months together, it seemed that my days as a

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the school community. This group worked on character education and coordinating parent volunteers during the fall, as well as staff community-building activities.

researcher in Room 7 were over. The hugs from the children as I left seemed to indicate the finality of this goodbye.

My plan was to write on Mondays and Fridays throughout the winter months in Nova Scotia. In January, right after the Christmas break, I started teaching two courses at the university where I am working now, and I tried to keep Mondays and Fridays clear for writing. I began to write about Julie and to try to put onto paper the ways she had filled my thoughts and how her life in school seemed to me to be circumscribed by stories that were already there, stories she just stepped into, the day she entered Grade 1. I wrote about her rocking back and forth on the carpet in class. I wrote about her telling of her auntie's funeral. I wrote about how she would proudly tell me that her mother wrote that book we were reading. I wrote about how concerned Laura was about the amount of time she missed from school. I sometimes wondered what she would think about what I was writing.

But I was restless, worrying about the other children, especially Bob. Would I have enough to write about him? After a few weeks, I switched to writing about Bob, to see if I could. It was surprising to me how my stories of Bob unfolded. As I pored over field notes and transcripts, I felt as though I was getting to know Bob in some new ways. This was kind of exciting, but at the same time, the work of the courses I was teaching became an inescapable force, and the writing days became sparse.

Then the courses ended, and I had a month before I was to return to Ravine Elementary, a month to write…but that is not what happened. I felt so far away from Bob and Julie, from Fareda and James. I felt like I had lost the sense of urgency that had propelled me to write in January and early February. It was like Room 7 was becoming all misty and blurry in my memory, difficult to see clearly. Did I really have something that I wanted to say about our experiences together? What could it have been?

As the time for my visit to Ravine School drew close, I did not feel very hopeful about returning to the class. There were two new students; the children would be older; there would be other changes. I didn't have as much writing done as I'd hoped. Things wouldn't be the same. Would there be a space for me?

On May 1, I drove up to Ravine Elementary School for the first time in four and a half months. As I approached the school, I was surprised to find myself feeling excited. It was with a growing sense of pleasure that I walked through the doors of the school. I poked my head in at the office and waved to Jeanette, who smiled and came to give me a welcoming hug. When I reached the 1/2 classrooms, Marni and Jean were standing by the pit, friendly faces greeting me. Then Julie appeared in a navy blue dress and took my hand to lead me into Room 7. Children came to hug me, a whole room full of them, and I kneeled down so I could talk very briefly with each of them. This was wonderful! Then things settled down, Laura greeted me warmly, and suddenly there I sat, at the back table with my notebook, and it was like I had never left.

Over the next few days, I realized that while I was able to slide right back into the classroom routine, some things were different. Each of the children, particularly in the lunchtime group, let me know about what was new in their lives. Julie was taller, as was James; Fareda had her long hair cut to shoulder length. Bob had some big new teeth, and his face looker a bit thinner and older. But beyond surface changes, they each had new stories to tell me.

And I felt that I had new ears to listen. In the fall, I often felt somewhat anxious, wanting our lunchtimes together to go well, wanting our talk to be meaningful and revolving around whatever book we were reading that day. I felt like a teacher, wanting to have a "good" lesson. In May, this pressure seemed to have disappeared. I did not have very high hopes about what I might accomplish with this visit to begin with, so this kept my expectations low. Somehow, this has allowed me to relax and attend more to each child, I think. I find, in this two and a half weeks, that I want just to sit or walk with a child, to engage in conversation, without worry about the value of this moment in my research, but just to live in the moment, with that child.

It is like magic, this experience of returning, of picking up some of the threads of past conversations with children, of weaving new threads into our relationship. I find that when I stop trying so hard, we have the best conversations. I have read each child several pages of writing that I have been doing around her/him. Each one has attended carefully to my writing, adding more details around many of the stories I recall about them, and pointing out changes they want made.

For example, I had written that Fareda was five when she and her family came to Canada from Pakistan. She told me that she was not yet five when they came, so we changed it with my pen on the copy we were reading, so that I could remember to change it later on the computer. Julie said it was her kookum, not her auntie, whose funeral she had attended last fall, so we changed that. I asked James if he remembered the story I scribed for him in November about a ghostly hand appearing in the playground, and he was enthusiastic in recounting the tale, adding that he enjoyed reading *Goosebumps* (Stine) books, which I had not known before. Bob sat very close to me when I read the story of him telling me about how he would melt diamonds and gold to make a special all-powerful sword. He began to whisper in my ear about his mother's rock and mineral collection. He made it clear that this was privileged information he was relating, glancing around the deserted library before whispering to me, hand on my arm.

I believe there is continuity in my relationships with each of these children, in spite of my leaving and returning. We are continuing to come to know one another in ways that I could not have envisioned, as the children and I imagine our unfolding stories to live by.

I'm looking forward to seeing you soon!

Love, Anne

September 19, 2003

Dear Jeff,

This sunny mid-September morning I'm at work, sitting at the table that Debbie and her students made, by the big window in Gabriel Hall, the one we call "The Table Where Rich People Sit," after the title of the Byrd Baylor (1998) book. The student teachers each made a tile for the table telling about the riches they bring to or find in teaching. It is a beautiful table, and as I sit here, I think of the riches I have been given as I have come to know each of the four children in my research. I am so far away from the school where Fareda, Bob, Julie, and James are beginning a new year, and yet I hold each of their faces in my memory as I get ready to meet the class of elementary pre-service teachers who will be arriving shortly. Will James find a friend in the learning strategies classroom (a classroom for students who has been tested and found to have learning disabilities) to which he has been assigned? Is Julie seeing herself, a beautiful Cree child, reflected in the books and other materials in her new classroom? Will Fareda have the courage to talk more often in Grade 3? Does Bob have opportunities to be playful with language in the ways he loves to?

I turn and look out the window at the leaves on the maple, oak, and elm trees, a deeper green than in early summer, now vibrant and rich. Their deepening colours make me think of the ways in which I continue to come to know each of the children more deeply as time passes and we remain a part of this narrative inquiry together. I am reminded of the three dimensions of the narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)—time, place, and the personal/social. This fall, it is one year since I began to be in Laura's classroom with these children, so the temporal dimension comes sharply into focus for me. The year has brought changes for us all. For each child, a whole year of school has now been completed, and they are beginning, a year older, in the next grade. For me, I have moved from full-time research in the field as a doctoral student to a position as a new academic several thousand kilometres away. I have continued to return to the school and to read and have conversations with each child over the spring months. This year has brought big changes for me.

I feel that I am still in relation with the children, and I am in this new place, the university, which brings me to the second of the three dimensions of narrative inquiry space, that of place. All four children are still attending Ravine School. I have experienced a career change from elementary teacher to a position in a university education program far from the school that the children attend. The personal/social dimension is the crucial piece here, because it is in this dimension that my connection with each child stays strong, despite the shifting element of place. Although I have not seen the children since June, and I am now far away from them, their images are foregrounded in my mind as I meet the new pre-service teachers. I think about each child daily, I write about each one, and I wonder what this new school year holds for him/her.

It's time to go upstairs to class, and as I gather up my things, I consider how my relationships with Fareda, Bob, James, and Julie have influenced my hopes and plans for this literacy course. I sent an email to Jean today, telling her how much I miss these children, and how I keep the image of each of their faces before me as I work with the pre-service teachers. I am remembering the things they have taught me as I try to get to know these new teachers. Jean replied with an amazing response. She told me that she had been at Ravine School this morning, for the first time this fall, and that Julie saw her in the hallway and came rushing up to give her a big hug. Julie quickly asked Jean if I was with her, and as I was not, when I would be coming to see her again. Hearing this story from Jean makes me smile, because I know that Julie is missing me as I am missing her. It seems that just as I hold her image in front of me as I go about my days here, she too is holding my image before her. We are both connected through the three-dimensional inquiry space, over time, over a great distance, through our ongoing personal relationship.

I feel in some ways as though I have a foot in two worlds. I wonder if this is a bit like how Fareda felt when she told me that she did not want to go to Pakistan with her family for a six-week trip last spring, and yet, when it was time to return to Canada, she didn't want to leave Pakistan. I want to be near the four children and continue to be a more visible part of their lives, and yet, I have moved in this other direction, away from their school. We are not exactly connected now, and yet we are, because their images live in the ways I am defining myself in this new position. My face is turned toward these children, and at the same time, I also face with hope the pre-service teachers whom I am coming to know. I wonder if you felt this way, Jeff, when you began your work as a teacher educator shortly after finishing your doctoral research with a group of children in a Grade 3 classroom.

See you soon!

Love, Anne

November 19, 2003

Dear Jeff,

As I return to Ravine School, over a year has passed since I first sat in the Grade 1/2 classroom with Laura and the children. When I see the children tomorrow, they will all be in different classrooms, with different teachers and classmates. How will they have changed? What are their stories of school and of their lives now? Will Julie want to walk with me at recess? Will Fareda show me some small treasure from her desk? Will Bob have new additions to his rock collection? Will James be reading *Goosebumps* (Stine, 1997) books, or will he have found a new reading interest?

I have not seen the children since mid-June, and it is now mid-November, five months later. I have been working with pre-service teachers and in many ways, it is a different kind of space that I inhabit these days—different from the elementary school Fareda, Bob, James and Julie attend, different from the classrooms where I have lived as teacher and as researcher. And yet, I find I am able to carry the images of each of these children into my current work in ways I might not have imagined last year. Julie and Fareda help me remember the importance of sharing a range of multicultural children's books in my literacy classroom, so that pre-service teachers may be moved to ensure that all children can see themsleves reflected in our literature. When students ask about testing practices and ways they might work with children with learning challenges, I think of James and how critical it is to come to know each child as a person, to look beyond the label. Bob's face floats through my mind when I set up word play games in the classroom; he would enjoy these, I think.

More than each of these instances, however, it is the continually deepening ways that I am coming to know each child that shape the attitudes and the knowing that I bring to the pre-service classroom. I have begun to realize that in coming to know each of the children in my research in the ways that I am, I come to see them in their multiplicities, and to understand them better, and to understand myself better in relation to them. I have an image of a stone dropped into a still pond, the circular waves rippling outward from it.

The months I spent in Laura's classroom last fall, and the lunch hours the four children and I spent together, were like the stone dropping into the pond. The waves began as I wrote about each child, and came to know her/him gradually. The ripples widened when I returned after a four-month absence and talked with each child in the spring. I believe that in returning again this fall, one year later, the ripples may continue to fan out from the initial opening made last year.

Finding ways to create spaces where we can have the kinds of conversations the children and I have had has been a challenge, and children's literature has been an important piece in this. So when I enter the classroom of 28 pre-service teachers, I bring a strong desire to create such spaces there, spaces where I can come to know each of my students in the ways that I have come to know Fareda, Bob, Julie, and James. Now I am seeking to know these pre-service teachers, to form relationships with them, to glimpse something of their stories to live by. All of this means making spaces for conversation. This fall I have read children's literature aloud and we have explored a book club format to try to get into this space, and to some degree, I think we get there some of the time. However, it is also the conversations in the out-of-classroom spaces, the hallways and the photocopy room, that help to widen the ripples in our knowing of one another, as the recess times and the visits to the library helped last year in school.

In writing about each child this fall, more than a year after I began to work in Laura's classroom, I find I have so many questions for them now. In my previous trips back from Nova Scotia, I had writing to share with each child, and much curiosity about each one, but it was not as focused as this. Now I want to ask James if he has read *The*

Chronicles of Narnia (Lewis, 1950–56) books, because I think he'd love them. I want to know what changes he is finding in his life, now that he is in a learning strategies classroom. I want to find out how Bob is getting along with his new teacher, and whether he likes to push those school and classroom boundaries a bit as he did last year. I want to ask Fareda more about the stories she told me of her trip to Pakistan, her former home, and her feelings of uncertainty about where home really is for her. I hope that Julie and I can talk about mothers and how important they are in our lives, and about the ways in which she was thinking about poverty last spring, and how she is thinking about it now.

I had the feeling this morning as I wrote part of a letter to James that I was getting to know him better and better, even though we haven't seen each other for some time. Writing about James (and about each child) requires a sustained focus on our conversations, the events we have shared, and my observations of him, through reading and rereading of transcripts, field notes, and artifacts like the scribed story we worked on in November 2002. This writing helps me to come to know James (and each child) more deeply because it involves attending to all that I know about him, and attempting to bring this knowing together with some coherence. Similarly, Hankins (2003) finds that while "it may seem odd to spend time with a child in absentia…this time of reflective writing held the power to transform [my] image of that child" (p. 53). I don't quite see the image I am forming of each child as transformed by my writing, but the writing does have a power. I think that for me, the image is given more detail, more depth over time, like a gradual filling in of a quick pencil sketch with colours, highlights and shadows, background and foreground.

I wonder whether I return this time to the children with these questions because the ripples have widened and I know them better. Perhaps it is because I have used a very personal form in my writing about them this time, a letter to each child. In letters, I have the sense of the kind of communication that will elicit a response. I have always enjoyed writing letters to you and to other family members and friends. It is a form that I am drawn toward, because it means a relationship is at its heart. It is not surprising that I am writing these letters to you, as my relationship with you is central to who I am. However, I had not planned to write letters to each child after my June trip to Ravine Elementary School; it just happened. As I began to write to Julie first (why do I begin with Julie each time I write?), the shape of the writing evolved into the form of a letter. I was using the word "you" as in "When I read this part to you, you smiled and gently but firmly set me straight." It just began to sound like a letter, and it seemed to work well to help me reconsider our conversations and my gradually deepening knowing of each child. So I continued and wrote letters to each child, letters that I will read to them over this next week. What will they think of these letters, I wonder, how will they respond?

I told Jean today that although I feel a certain angst when people ask me when I will be finished my field work, and then my dissertation, I do not feel that I am ready to take that step yet. I feel that my relationship with each of the children in this work has deepened and is continuing to grow. There is more that I want to do. Recalling the idea of the painting of each child's image, I want to add that I am in the picture with each child too, and that the connections between us, our relationships, are still being filled in, brush stroke by brush stroke.

It's been good talking with you in this letter. I do appreciate your support so much.

Love, Anne

November 21, 2003

Dear Jeff,

Returning to Ravine Elementary School yesterday, I felt both anticipation and fear. At last, I would see the children with whom I am in relation, and at the same time, the reality of five months apart would be made evident in our meeting. Would they remember some of the things we had talked about last year? Would they want to hear my writing about them and respond to it, as they did so beautifully last May and June? Would they have changed much in my absence?

Here I must confront a struggle I face, having written about these children for the past five months, a struggle not to keep each child's image frozen in my memory, preserved like mustard pickles in the jar, colourful and beautiful, but unchanging. Even as I have written my way into new understandings about each one, the temptation grows, the temptation to hold tight to the Bob I know, or the Fareda I know. I recognize, sometimes reluctantly, that I cannot hold them too tight. For example, two days ago, I read Jean a piece about Bob, and we both realized, as the words lingered in the air, that the writing had a very finished quality, as if who Bob is had been all accounted for and decided. Bob, like each of the children in this research, will be telling new stories of who he is, and who he is becoming, each time I see him. Each child will have changed, just as I have changed since last spring. This is what I anticipate and to some extent what I fear.

As I entered the school in the morning, children walked quickly past me out to a waiting school bus, followed by several parents and their teacher, who was Laura! She is teaching in a grade five/six classroom this year, and the class was going to Ice School, a field trip to a local rink for skating lessons. Laura smiled broadly and gave me a hug on her way to the bus, saying that we will have to find time for a talk this week. I agreed and waved goodbye as she boarded the bus. Turning to enter the school, I thought about how central Laura's presence and participation were to this research work last year, as I spent a great deal of time in her classroom and with Fareda, Julie, Bob, and James in out-of-classroom spaces around the school. Laura willingly welcomed me in the classroom, and allowed me to read and talk with children, to have time with them, to come to know them in their classroom. This year, I will be going to different classrooms to find each child, although Fareda and Bob are in the same three/four classroom. Since Laura is not teaching the four children in this research study anymore, I wonder if her stories about each child will shift somewhat, as she moves back from the direct connections she had with them last year, to become more of an observer this year. It will be good to talk with her this week.

Seeing Laura this morning, I was reminded of how young (and energetic!) she is. She had her 29th birthday last fall when I was in her classroom, so now she is 30 years old, not much older than many of the pre-service teachers I have been working with. I remember writing in September about how I am carrying the images of Julie, Bob, James, and Fareda into the teacher ed classroom with me. Now I wonder if I begin to carry the images of Sherry, Derek, Tara, and the other pre-service teachers with me as I return to Ravine School. I am starting to see and appreciate how Laura is working to figure out who she is as a teacher, just as the beginning teachers in my course are. My parent knowledge (Pushor, 2001) helps me think about this. When Thomas, our oldest child, was born, I was teaching Kindergarten. Being a new parent gave me a window into just how amazing those four and five year olds were. They had already accomplished so much in the short space of four years. I could see, as a parent, how strong the connection was to their earliest years, something that had not always been apparent to me. Today, when I look at Laura's work in imagining who she is becoming as a teacher, I think about what a big job this is, and how the pre-service teachers are just beginning to embrace this task. Laura has moved farther along in this journey than these new teachers, but she is on a similar journey. This story of Laura as on a journey toward becoming is a story I am only now starting to be aware about. My shifting perspectives, my new teacher educator eyes, help me see Laura in new ways.

Jean had met Laura a week or so ago, and Laura said she was looking forward to talking with me about James, who is in the learning strategies classroom this year. Laura had been talking with Kristi, the learning strategies teacher, and Kristi had been telling her that James is actually reading quite well, and seems to be a good student. Laura said to Jean that she felt she had had the wool pulled over her eyes by James last year, and that things were maybe not as they had seemed when he was in her class. Laura and Kristi have begun to talk about whether James really belongs in a learning strategies classroom.

Maybe Laura is starting to have a new story of this child, because Kristi now has this other story of James. This seems connected to Laura's journey, as she imagines herself as teacher. I hope we can talk about this when we see each other.

Coming into the school, I looked at the teddy bears by the front door, the children's artwork in the halls, and the bright colours everywhere. I heard children's voices singing a lilting tune, and I checked Ed, the big snake in a terrarium in the library, to see if he had grown. I saw James's new teacher, Kristi, in the staff room as I went in to hang my jacket. She said I could come to her classroom any time. I could feel myself slipping back into the rhythm of this place. Even the smells are familiar, the cinnamon and coffee smell of the staff room, the subtle wet boot smell in the hallway (soon to grow stronger after a snowy recess), the fresh smell (is it a new book smell?) in the library. Returnings are sometimes hard, and you know I was finding it difficult to leave our family and travel across the country for this trip. It has been a challenging fall, and I did not feel sure that I could do this. But this reentering the school feels very right, and I realize anew how I have missed this place and my work and relationships here.

Talk to you soon!

Love, Anne

November 26, 2003

Dear Jeff,

I am staying on the ninth floor of the hotel and can see the river valley and the downtown core of the city from here. I think having a panoramic view as I do here is something that helps me think and write. The god's eye view is similar to the view at our cottage in Parrsboro, high up on a cliff overlooking the Bay of Fundy, and yet very different. I can see for miles in both places, but what I see in each place is very diverse. I have found both places help me to write, although one is urban and one by the ocean. Moving from this city in western Canada to Nova Scotia in the midst of my research, place, as a dimension of narrative inquiry space, looms large for me. One aspect of this has been finding a place to think and write.

I am reminded of *A Quiet Place* (Wood, 2002), a book I read with the children in our lunchtime book group last November, with beautiful illustrations of a variety of landscapes and the repeated phrase, "A ______ could be your quiet place." Bob liked the outer space scene in that book, and James was drawn to the beach picture. Julie said that her bunk bed was her quiet place (she has the top bunk, and her sister sleeps on the bottom). Fareda was not there that day. I am fortunate to have found a quiet place here in this hotel room for a couple of weeks. When my shoulders get sore and I need to take a break from the computer, I go to the window and stretch, looking out at the tall downtown buildings and the river below. The residential neighbourhoods spill out to the sides of the downtown core and beyond this, the smokestacks and low grey buildings of the factories, oil refineries, and other industrial plants can be seen on the horizon.

Would the words I write be different if I were down on the ground floor, seeing the world outside my window from a different perspective? Maxine Greene (1995) writes about seeing big and seeing small, as a way of thinking about perspective. Seeing small is the view from a distance. In the field of education, seeing small might be seeing the school or a group of schools as a system, and the people as components of that system, as part of a overall larger entity. Seeing small, it would be difficult to come to know the detailed worlds of each child or teacher, to see them as unique and complex, because the focus is on the whole system. In contrast, seeing big in education is the up-close involvement with a small number of children, teachers, parents, or others, the developing of relationships, so that one can begin to understand the unique and multiple dimensions of those persons. It is the kind of research I am working toward as a narrative inquirer. I am working to keep my perspective on the ground floor as I write, to keep seeing big, to allow my relationship with each child to guide my writing, as that relationship unfolds and changes with each conversation.

Thinking about this in relation to the time I have spent with Fareda, Bob, James, and Julie this week and last, each of the children I have been coming to know has unique and multiple perspectives that they bring to our reading of books and our conversations. As well, I realize that the context of our conversations together makes such a difference. Bob was distant and not very talkative the first day I saw him last week. At the end of our time together, it was lunchtime and he said that he was hungry. I did not understand how important this was until I saw Bob yesterday (although I was worried about the lack of connection I felt with him). Yesterday, he was very excited to talk with me about what is new in his life, and to respond to my writing about him. He came close and whispered in my ear and was full of jokes and stories. Bob helped me remember that there are many things affecting our conversations, and they may sometimes be invisible to me, but are nonetheless critically important.

In talking with Laura yesterday, I found that she is very busy with her new class, and that while the children from her room last year come and give her hugs and say hello from time to time, she is not as connected to them as she was, understandably. After seeing big (Greene, 1995) with these children last year, Laura is now seeing small, as they recede from her daily life and are on the periphery of her life in school this year. I find it odd that the person I used to be able to talk with in greatest detail about the children is no longer in a position to do this. She has moved on to a new class at a different grade level. This is one of several differences I find on returning to Ravine School this fall. The children are in three different classrooms, and I do not have a relationship with any of their new teachers. Room 3, the empty classroom last year, was where we often went to read and talk. This year, Laura's class is in that room. On my first day there last week, Laura's class was away, so we were able to use Room 3 as we had last year. Yesterday, however, we had to meet in the library. These changes, though maybe not profound, formed a context for the conversations I had with each child. I wondered what other shifts I would encounter during this visit.

I feel an increasing sense of unease in my relationship with each of the children. I worry about each of them in different ways and wonder how the challenges each one faces will affect them. Will the school story of Fareda as a poor student accompany her year after year, with her amazing ability to story her complex life as child of Pakistan and Canada remaining submerged along with her ESL challenges? Will Bob receive the support he needs as he overcomes his struggles as a writer, or will his verbal strengths and self-assurance mean that he slips through the cracks? What directions will James's life in school take as his view of himself as a reader and writer contrasts with a view of him as a struggling student in the learning strategies classroom? How might Julie's growing success as a reader be storied in the context of this school, where she is one of the few Aboriginal children? I realize that I am involved in what happens with each of these children and that my relationship with each of them is not bounded by research timelines. Yet, I am far away in Nova Scotia most of the time. I yearn to keep seeing each of these children big, despite the changes in the temporal and place dimensions of the three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Showing Narrative Authority

Yesterday, as I read some of my writing about each child to her/him, I thought about how each one, in our time together, showed his or her own narrative authority (Olson, 1995). I read Bob the piece about how he had described melting diamonds to make a sword blade, and how he had said he would need a really, really big, strong pot to melt the diamonds. Bob shook his head, and gently took the pen from my fingers, crossing out the line about the pot. He said, "No, diamonds should be melted right in the fire," and he printed "in the fire" beside that line. Bob was very engaged in the story I was retelling of him that day, and he felt comfortable doing his own editing of the piece. That is the first time a child has actually done that with me in this research setting. This writing really did seem to resonate with Bob, to connect with how he stories himself as knowledgeable about minerals and metalworking.

I am reminded of last June, when Bob told me several times, "I know what you're writing" as I read to him from the piece I had written (Transcripts, June 11, 2003, p. 19). He knew what the words on the page said, but I wonder if he also meant that he knew those stories I wrote of him because they were reflective of his stories of himself. When I read Bob the piece about his conversation with me about visiting his grandfather's farm and making a lamp with his brother (Transcripts, June 11, 2003, p. 15–19), perhaps this resonated with his story of himself as a person who likes to build things, like lamps, a machine in his basement (p. 21–23), or a window for the shed at the farm (p. 17–18). He may have glimpsed himself in the mirror that my stories of him provided.

When I read Julie some of my writing about her, she told me she was also writing about us at home. A few minutes later, she asked if she could hold my notebook and pen, and she drew me a picture of herself and me (reading together). She also went to a shelf in the library and chose a book to read to me, so that we both read to each other, and both wrote (and drew) about each other. I got a strong sense that Julie sees us as in this (research) together, which is how I see it too. This is a shared authority here (Oyler, 1996), a co-authorship we are engaged in. Julie's narrative authority can be seen in her eagerness to write and read alongside me, and to put me in her picture, just as I have put her in mine.

James also showed his narrative authority as I spent time with him, reading some of my writing to him, and later reading a book about ancient Egypt. James re-entered the story I had scribed for him in Grade 1, which ended with him being lonely on the playground, and moved that story into this year, telling me that he did not have a special friend in his class this year. Later, as we read about Egyptian mummies, James knew more than the book did about the topic, amazing me with his indepth knowledge of the mummification process and the hieroglyphics on the tombs. He was clearly able to author a story of himself as an expert on mummies. I was excited by this sophisticated conversation with James.

Fareda was not in school yesterday when I was there. It was the end of Ramadan, and she was at home to celebrate with her family. I was disappointed, but then it occurred to me that Fareda was showing a narrative authority by her absence, too. Fareda has been working out a story of herself as a girl with both a western Canadian home and a Pakistani culture and home, a girl who is authoring two narratives. It seemed rather fitting that she should be home for a traditional celebration on the day that I was there to talk with her about her stories of two home places. She lives amidst differing expectations and values, and she is creating narratives that help her to blend these, or to live between them. Sometimes, narrative authority is shown without words, as in Fareda's absence today. Neumann (1997), in *Ways Without Words*, writes of coming to understand her parents' stories of their lives as Holocaust survivors partly through the untold stories, or "the interplay of text and silence" (p. 92) in their tellings and not-tellings of their stories. Neumann states she "learned from [her] mother's life that even in the silence of a story that lives without words, there exists a text to know and to tell" (p. 92). In Fareda's absence, I have no written transcript of a conversation with her, but I have a sense of her unfolding story to live by, as she stays at home on this important day and takes part in family celebrations.

It has been wonderful to be here again Jeff.

Love, Anne

April 24, 2004

Dear Jeff,

I've been here for almost a week now, meeting daily with Jean and writing like mad the rest of the time. It was such a whirlwind before I left to fly out here, making sure everything was ready for convocation next weekend for our B. Ed. graduates. I barely had time to talk with you before I jumped on the plane. I keep thinking about the portfolios of the students in my literacy class.[15] They were so amazing! The idea was for each student to use artifacts from their lives, from home, school practicum experiences, university classes, or all of these, to illustrate her/his understandings and emerging beliefs around literacy, and to write a bit about herself/himself in relation with these artifacts. Each person's portfolio was unique to her/him, and reading through them was fascinating, providing me with windows into their worlds, and often mirrors into mine. However, there was something missing; I often wanted to pause and ask a question about an artifact, or to talk to a student about how her photo or his story reminded me of something from my own teaching, parenting, or childhood. I began to realize that if I had been able to sit with each person and talk about her/his artefacts with her/him, this would have been a more educative, more meaningful experience. Nona Lyons's (1998) writing about portfolio conferences resonates for me, reminding me of the importance of constructing our stories of one another *over time*.

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[15] I taught this course in relation with my colleague, Janice Huber, a woman who is thoughtful about students' work, envisioning it in the midst of their full and complex lives, and who wants to work alongside students to come to deeper understandings, as I do.

As I think about this now, sitting in my hotel room in this western Canadian city, having just returned to the school where I have spent so much time over the past two years doing my doctoral research, I realize anew the power of being able to be in relation with students over longer periods of time. It is now two years since I began to be a part of Laura's classroom as a participant and researcher. After the four months (in the fall of 2002) of being in the classroom at least three days a week, I have been able to return quite a few times to visit with the four children in the lunchtime book group. In these returnings, I've been able to ask the questions that arose for me as I spent time with their drawings and stories, my field notes and transcripts, the artifacts I collected over time. We have been able to pick up wonders and loose threads from earlier conversations and follow them further. Maybe this is what is missing from my work with the B. Ed. students and their amazing portfolios. We had a class together for 12 weeks, and began to know each other, at least in some ways. But the portfolios were handed in at the end of the course. I did not have a chance to talk with students about their artifacts at all. I will now see these students only at convocation ceremonies, and perhaps, for some of them, not again. We will not be able to pick up the loose threads of earlier talks, or to wander through the portfolios together. I see now that this leaves me (us?) feeling like we have left things unfinished. Next year, how might I plan the course differently?

I want to tell you about being at the school yesterday. I was very nervous, as I got ready in the morning. Riding there on the bus, I couldn't concentrate on the book I was reading, *Shaping a Professional Identity: Stories of Educational Practice* (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). The children hadn't seen me since the fall. Would they even remember me? Arriving at the school, I paused to change my shoes at the entrance and adjusted my smile, hoping I did not appear as tense as I felt. I walked into the office, and there was Jeanette, talking with Carla and Caron, the school secretaries. All three turned and greeted me warmly. Jeanette came to give me a hug and took me into her office. I began to relax just a little then. Jeanette and I talked about her very busy year, with Sally, the vice-principal, away on maternity leave. I told Jeanette about the writing I have been doing, the fictional pieces around each of the four children in my study. We talked about the lives of each child and how Jeanette sees them shifting and changing over this year. Jeanette knows each of the children in the school in ways that amaze me. She works hard to find ways to do this, and so she has a "seeing big" (Greene, 1995) perspective on each of the four students that we discuss. Her perspective is a "seeing big" *over time*, a long-term view that gives her a depth of context for each child. This temporal aspect of her relationship with the children and families of Ravine School is important in many ways, not least of which is how it allows her to make decisions based on a bigger picture of a child than her/his test scores or attendance record or other statistics might reveal.

Soon it was time to confront my concerns about whether the four children would still feel any connection with me, after being apart since the fall. When I picked Fareda up from her classroom, she immediately turned to me in the hallway and told me that her grandmother had died, the grandmother in Pakistan about whom she had told me stories. This was almost before I could say hello to her. It was as though I had just been away for a day, and Fareda was immediately picking up the thread of our conversations about her feelings around her life in Canada and her memories of Pakistan. I am humbled by her trust in me, and her willingness to continue our relationship over the course of many months, punctuated by my long absences. It's as though she is thinking, "You've been away but I've been thinking about you, and I know what we talked about, you and I." Being in relationship with Fareda (and with each of the others) over time, nearly two years, has been so important to our coming to know each other so well. For me, this stands out as key in my research. These four children are at the centre of my research. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind me, people are at the heart of a narrative inquiry.

Bob did not immediately say much when I saw him, but he was interested in my new tape recorder, and my story of how the old one had broken. After a bit, he quizzed me on the difference between coal and diamonds, a favorite pastime between us, and then he told me that because his mom and dad are divorcing, his house will be sold and he will be moving to a new one, closer to the school. This was the first time Bob had ever mentioned his parents' divorce, although I had been aware of it since the beginning of our relationship. As with Fareda, I was amazed and humbled by the way Bob let me into his life, not having seen me for months.

The other two children, Julie and James, also welcomed me back into their lives warmly, and I realized that my anxiety about whether or not they would remember me was needless. I feel inspired by the conversations I had with each child yesterday. It was great to see them all. At the same time, I feel a sadness as I realize that I may not see at least one of them again. Julie told me that she and her family are moving to Calgary in the summer. It is hard to imagine the school without Julie, as she has become so central to my knowing of that place. Julie was concerned about this too, and asked me if I would write to her in her new home. I promised that I will, and so I must find out if the school will have her new address. I know that Marni and Shaun, also researchers in this school, have already experienced this sort of thing, because students they were working with moved to new homes and new schools. This is the first time for me, and while I am very aware of how fortunate I have been, I know I am going to miss this little girl for a long time.

As these relationships draw to a close I think about the parallels with the goodbyes I exchanged with the B. Ed. students I mentioned at the beginning of this letter. These B. Ed. students are graduating and heading off all over the world to begin their careers. It is sad (and also exciting) to see them go after spending a term or even two terms together. I am feeling a sense of loss in both cases, but there are such differences too. I leave these children who have been part of my research with so many stories of them and me, because I have known them for nearly two years. These children will be in my memories, in my stories to live by. I have known the B. Ed. students for less time, a year at most. It makes me wonder about the design of teacher education programs, and the length of time we as teacher educators can spend with our students. The program here is two years long, but I do not have two years with the students with whom I work. Are there other ways this might work, alternatives which might allow more extended time with a small group of students? I know that other university teacher education programs have tried various alternative models. Is that something we could talk about at our university?

I look forward to talking with you more about this.

Love, Anne

May 14, 2004

Dear Jeff,

As I look back over the collection of 12 letters I have written you over the past two years, I realize a number of ideas have been threaded through them. In this, my last letter from the field, I want to pull these threads and explore my unfolding understandings of them with you.

The temporal dimension of the narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in which this study has grown is one that stands out in high relief for me now, looking over these letters, which I began to write in June 2002. Coming to know the four children in both in-classroom and out-of-classroom spaces, over nearly two years, has been an inspiring experience. Having the opportunity to think about our book conversations and other moments together over this time has helped me to understand that time is an integral aspect of building relationships in a narrative inquiry. I could not have gotten to know these children in the same depth in a few weeks or months. As Noddings (1992), writes, teaching, like parenting, requires long periods of time, "continuity in relations…built on the foundation of trust" (p. xii). I wonder what might happen if I were able to continue in relation with these four children even beyond these two years.

I also found that my returnings to the school after several weeks or months away, in the past year and a half, provided both me and the children with windows into our lives, the work of imagining our stories to live by, and provided me with mirrors into my slowly shifting transition from teacher to teacher-researcher and teacher educator. I believe I am a teacher; that is an integral and embodied plotline in how I compose my identity. I am perhaps expanding my story of what it means to be a teacher, to include now these other possibilities, the researcher thread, which left me in such liminal space (Heilbrun, 1999; Kennedy, 2001) during my first months at Ravine School, and the teacher educator thread, which has coincided with my dissertation writing. Heilbrun writes of being on the threshold, or limen, between two spaces as a liminal position, as when we stand in the doorway of a room, hovering at the threshold, not yet inside, but at the edge. This can be a space of dis-ease, a space of dis-positioning (Vinz, 1997). Perhaps I was on the threshold in this way, as I experienced these shifts in my story to live by. I continue to be uncertain and sometimes overwhelmed by these new threads in my story to live by.

The liminality of my position as doctoral researcher at Ravine School is an issue I mentioned in my first letter from the field in June 2002, when I participated in the release of the butterflies with Laura's class after we had watched them grow over several weeks. I was aware of the tentativeness of my beginning days at the school, as I watched the cautious first flights of those 22 beautiful butterflies. Returning to the school in the fall, I felt slightly out of place as the teachers took part in the busy preparations for the first day of school. I have been a teacher for many first days of school, but never before had I been in this "other" position, a researcher, trying to help Laura and the others, uncertain about who I now was on the school landscape.

Once school began, I experienced some ambiguity in my positioning as a researcher alongside the children, in the classroom, on the playground at recess, and in the halls. I had become dis-positioned, as Vinz (1997) phrases it. I *felt* like a teacher, ready to work and play with children in journals, with clay and paints, at centres, and in sharing books together. As a participant in the life of Laura's classroom, I could do many of these things, but I was not the teacher. I was reminded of Oyler's (1996) writing about who has or may have authority in the classroom: teacher, students, or both. I felt I was *not* the one with the authority to decide if we would go outside for recess early because it was such a sunny beautiful morning, or that we might leave the paintings on the carpet to dry so that we could move into centres. I was not the one parents turned to with news of dentist appointments or lost shoes. This uncertainty about who I was in Ravine School permeated my field notes, and as I wrote to you, Jeff, I realized that living in this liminal space deeply affected how I saw what was unfolding around me on the school landscape.

Vinz (1997) writes that in dis-positioning ourselves, we make "gaps and spaces through which to (re)member ourselves as we examine the principles behind our practices" (p. 139). The gaps and spaces I made were visible in my field texts, and in my letters to you. Through my wonderings as I lived uncertainly from day to day in Ravine School, I explored my dis-positioning there and began to recollect myself, with subtle but crucial changes. Although I was quite focused on the children in Laura's classroom when I wrote my field notes, I also wove in little snippets of wonders and doubts about my shifting story of who I was in that school, with those teachers and children. I begin to consider now, as I look back through the letters I've sent you, how my own stories to live by have shifted and changed over the past two years. I believe I recollect myself a little differently, having been alongside Laura, the children of Room 7, and especially the four children in the lunchtime book group. As I began to work with pre-service teachers as a teacher educator, I find small scenes or fragments of conversations from Ravine School days often drift into my thoughts, subtly shaping how I am with these beginning teachers.

Because the space I occupied at Ravine School was a liminal one, my perspectives on the stories children brought to school and on the school story I found there were not the same as if I had been a teacher there. I could look sideways at events or conversations (Murphy, 2004), seeing in them other layers that might not have been clear to me had I been on staff. Do you remember when I told you about Julie telling me that she had found her godmother in the woods, the day we read *Everybody Needs a Rock* (Baylor, 1974)? This kind of mysterious comment was not uncommon for Julie, and I suspect that had I been her teacher, I might have felt some impatience with this, because it was not always easy to understand what Julie was getting at, the meaning she was making. Instead, because I was in this liminal space as researcher, alongside her in the lunchtime book conversations and elsewhere, I found Julie's comments intriguing, and I could attend to her tellings of her narratives of experience in ways I suspect I might not have if I had been her teacher, busy with other seemingly more pressing priorities.

In this liminal space (Heilbrun, 1999; Kennedy, 2001) as researcher at Ravine School, I gradually began to improvise a story to live by, perhaps in the way Bateson (1994) suggests. I moved from reading Laura's choices of books with students to choosing books I thought would provide "contexts that nurture" (Greene, 1995) for each child. I imply, in this phrase of Greene's, spaces for the children and I to tell and retell our stories to live by. I found several out-of-classroom spaces in the school that we could use to gather and read and talk in small groups. This improvisation was necessary because I never knew when one or more of these spaces might be used for other purposes. As well as this sort of improvising, I think I have been improvising an identity for myself at the same time. Perhaps over the months I spent at Ravine School I was coming to "un-know" (Vinz, 1997) my position on that school landscape, so that I felt I could be more than one thing, a teacher, there. I have been improvising in other parts of my life for some time, as parent, partner, daughter, graduate student, friend, finding ways to create and recreate my identity as events shifted and places and times changed. Coming onto the school landscape as a researcher, not in my familiar position as teacher, I have been awakened to my liminality in this place of school, a place where I had for many years felt quite certain and secure. I am beginning to see the potent possibilities in this shift, as I hovered on the threshold.

Some days I literally did hover on the threshold between the classroom and the hallway, uncertain about what to do next. I have an image of watching Julie run to the bathroom, upset, while I stood at the classroom door, wondering whether to step inside like a teacher, to help settle the class after recess, or to go to the bathroom to talk with

Julie and try to help her. As the teacher, I would have wanted to go to Julie immediately. However, I could not have left the class in an uproar to attend to one child. I would have had to wait until later to talk with Julie. As researcher in the classroom, I had a choice I would not have as the teacher. I chose to go to Julie, leaving Laura to sort things out in the classroom. I was able to focus on relationships with each of the children in my liminal position in the classroom. This perception of freedom, the opening up of spaces in which to relate more deeply with a child, sits alongside my discomfort when that liminal space seemed to leave me no shoal to stand on, no space that felt secure, as when I was in the parent-teacher meeting back in September 2002. I felt like such an imposter, standing there telling parents about my research plans, when I felt as though I should be talking with them about the curriculum their children and I would shape in the classroom. The story of myself as teacher felt so comfortable. I did not know a story of myself as researcher. The uncertainty I felt provided an opportunity, over time, to imagine my story to live by a little differently.

I notice these letters reflect my sense of living in a three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The dimensions of time and place have been critically important as I travelled back and forth between my work in eastern Canada and Ravine School in western Canada, over the past year and a half. I know I mentioned to you before how my continuing relationship with the four children in this study over nearly two years shaped my understandings of their unfolding stories to live by. The places that I know with each child, the playground spots where we played and ran and climbed, the quiet places we searched out in the school building when all our usual spots were taken, the classroom, the hallway, the "bubble" (an office space behind Laura's classroom), all these places remind me of particular conversations with one or more children. I carry these memories into new places as I set up my classroom in the old vine-covered brick building that houses the B. Ed. program where I currently work. I wrote earlier about how Silko (1996) says that one's "sense of identity is intimately linked with the surrounding terrain" (p. 43). I consider now how I am carrying my stories to live by from Ravine School into the teacher education program here, and how memories of place are integral to my sense of identity.

The personal/social, the third dimension of the narrative inquiry space, has been a bit like a pebble in my shoe, worrying me, irritating me, with its insistency that I notice, that I awaken to its importance. Yet it is the hard one to write about, to find words for. When I wrote a story earlier in the dissertation about myself as a grade five girl, I noted some of the ways in which I am "complicit in the world [I] study" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 61). I found myself confronted with the impact of this complicity again; the ways I see the children in this research study composing their stories to live by are so intricately interwoven with who I am and who I am becoming. This is a piece I would often rather ignore. I would like to be able to say that how I saw Bob's story to live by unfolding is in fact, a true story, THE story. But that pebble in my shoe reminds me that how I attend to Bob, and to each of the children, has perhaps as much to do with my own narrative past as it does with what was happening on any given day during our conversations. Memories of my own son at seven years old were surely dancing through my head and body as I sat crouched under the stairwell in the library with Bob talking knotted shoelaces. I brought all of these memories, alive in my body, into Room 7 when I began my study. I found myself longing to slip into what was familiar, to *be* the teacher here that I felt myself to be. Instead, I had to imagine another kind of space to occupy, alongside the teacher and children as they lived out their stories. This led to some uncertainty about who I was and who I was becoming both in this classroom and in my shifting story to live by. If I sound wistful, perhaps I am a bit, but I am also very glad to have had this opportunity to know and un-know (Vinz, 1997) myself as teacher. There is promise in this kind of learning, I think. Who I was becoming in the classroom and in the lunchtime book group was perhaps shaping who the children were imagining themselves to be while in that space. Grumet (2003) celebrates a "curriculum that acknowledges the existential realities of its teachers and students. These teachers make themselves present so that their students may be present as well, and in that presence integrate their anxious, sweaty, sublime ideas and feelings with the stuff of texts and theories" (p. 257). I think the vulnerability I experienced may have provided a space for children to make themselves a bit more vulnerable too, as we read and talked about texts and lives. I think that as you read about the four children in the next four chapters, Jeff, you will see this integration happening and the ways that these children told their stories, as they work and play at composing their own stories to live by.

The relationships I have been so fortunate to have with each of these children have been powerful and life-changing for me. The trust and the ability each child showed to leap back into the conversation after my sometimes extended absences was humbling and amazing to me. Remember how Fareda told me of her grandmother's death, as soon as I saw her in April? That way of picking up the narrative thread where we left off four months earlier, the familiar kind of intimacy and ease of conversation I have with my sisters, is what I experienced with Fareda and with each of the children. My relationship with each one has been unique, each relationship different from the other. As you read the narrative accounts of each child over the next chapters, you will see how these unique relationships began and unfolded.

Thank you, Jeff, for the space to talk with you about my work over the past couple of years. Being able to write these letters to you, and to think about some of these issues alongside you, has been a great gift.

Love, Anne

A Reader's Guide to the Chapters Ahead

In each of the next four chapters (chapters 3 to 6), I write about my understandings of the ways each of the four children in the lunchtime book group were composing their own stories to live by over the almost two years that I spent in relation with them. This time spent in relation provided me with a window into their lives. Each chapter has one child as its central character. I begin each chapter by telling of my first glimpses of the child, and the ways we first came to know each other. I explore the ways each child intrigued me from the very beginning of my time in Laura's classroom: Julie's quiet ways, Bob's sense of humour, James's depth of general knowledge, and Fareda's concentration on composing a story to live by. Drawing heavily on the field texts, both my field notes and our recorded conversations, I attempted to sketch my early knowing of each child, as I understood it at that point in our relationships.

Following this description of my early knowing, there is one or, in some cases, more than one section giving my account of each child during the lunchtime book group and during book conversations held during morning Stations in Laura's classroom. In this account the importance that a certain book had for each child becomes visible. In conversation we sometimes found the in-between spaces to talk about our stories to live by, as we were imagining them at that point in time. I gradually came to notice tensions within my knowing of each child's story to live by. Sometimes these tensions were between the child's story to live by and the construction placed on that child by the school story of him or her (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Awakening to tensions was part of the process of my unfolding understanding of each child's stories to live by, and of the school stories and stories of school that lived at Ravine Elementary in connection with each child. Through the sections that represent my growing understandings of each child's engagement in the work of identity-making, I highlight tensions in connection with how I was coming to know his or her story to live by. These sections of each chapter are in **bold font**. In chapter 7, I return to the tensions and reconsider them, looking back on the stories we lived and told, and the stories I now tell as I look back.

The sections I wrote after my intense time at Ravine School in the fall of 2002 take different forms. In January 2003, I moved to a small university town in eastern Canada and made trips back to the school every few months. I wrote pieces about each child during January to May 2003, the first few months in my new community, looking back on the fall of 2002. When I flew across Canada to return to Ravine School in May 2003, I took with me some of my writing about each child, to share with each one. After May 2003, the writing became in part a response to, and a reflection on, my conversations with each child during each visit back to Ravine School.

I returned to Ravine School for three weeks in May 2003 and for two weeks in June 2003. These spring days at Ravine School were important because they provided a thread of continuity for me and the children, of leaving and returning, of picking up the conversations where we left off, but with possibilities for talking about things that had changed during that time. My next trip to the school was for two weeks in October 2003. For this trip, I wrote a letter to each child, filled with my growing wonders, questions, and noticings about the ways they were imagining their stories to live by, based on the conversations we had in the spring and on my knowing of them over the past year. These letters are included in the chapters ahead.

After the letter to each child in each chapter, there is a fictional piece I wrote for each one, to share with her/him during my 10-day visit at Ravine School in April 2004. The story I wrote about each child was inspired by a piece of literature that had been important in that child's relationship with me. For example, I wrote a piece about Fareda called *Fareda's Journey*, based on the conversations we had as a result of reading *A Gift for Gita* (Gilmore, 1998) together. Within each fictional piece, I tried to illustrate some of the ways I understood each child to be imagining her/his own stories to live by. I attempted to give back to each child a sketch of herself/himself, small and incomplete, but thoughtfully done within the context of a relationship that spanned nearly two years.

The children have given me so much, and I wanted to give each of them something to help them remember this experience we shared. While I have shared much of my writing about them with each child, I am not sure that a copy of my dissertation will be meaningful for them at this point in their lives (although it may be later, and I hope it may be meaningful to parents). I wanted to write a story for each one that they could engage with now, as seven and eight year olds.

I shared these fictional pieces with each child during my trip to Ravine School in April 2004, in what proved to be a moving experience for me and perhaps for each of them, in different ways. The last section in each chapter is my reflection on the experience of reading these pieces with each child, and finally, an endnote in the words of each child.

Chapter 3: Bob—A Way with Words

Noticing Bob

When I first met Bob, with his sky blue eyes and his new front teeth that looked way too big for his face, I thought he looked like a cute 7-year-old boy. His hair was curly and dark blond, perpetually rumpled-looking. He had some friends in the class, Jeff and Rob in particular, and he seemed quite happy to be there, at ease in his second year with Miss Green in the Grade 1/2 classroom. In the first weeks of school, Bob's comments caught my attention several times during morning message.

> Tim went to the board to circle the word "little", using a marker. Bruce said, "That colour is violet." Laura told him, "No, violet is more of a pinky-purple." Bob said clearly and with emphasis, "That would be magenta." (Field notes, September 16, 2002)

> Today was photo day at school. One sentence in the morning message said, "Where will we go for our pictures?" Laura asked several children to guess. Eli said the music room. Rob said a classroom. Rosie said the library. In the next sentence, Laura had written, "My guess is the gym." Bob exclaimed, "You could have wrote the big word for gym—gymnasium!" "That's right," agreed Laura. "I could." (Field notes, October 7, 2002)

I continued to notice Bob's unique and creative way with words.

> After calendar one morning, Bob came up to me, on his way to get his snack, with his vest draped over his shoulders. He said, "This is how they wore them in the

> old days!" I asked tentatively, "Is this a cape? Like Sherlock Holmes?" Bob replied, "No, it's a clone…no, not a clone…" Jeff was with Bob, and said, "A cloak!" Bob, agreed, "Yeah, a cloak!" Those two would be the ones to know that type of thing. They really attend to language (although not always in the way they are expected to in school). (Field notes, November 25, 2002)

I gradually noticed that Bob was showing up often in my field notes; he began to intrigue me as I got to know him a little more. Bob had a wonderful verbal personality and often shared glimpses of the wealth of general knowledge he had amassed, as well as of his unique perspectives.

> It was time for reading club, an activity that occurred first thing in the morning, most mornings. Fareda and Bob pulled up chairs beside mine on the carpet and we began to read the book Fareda brought over, *Clifford the Small Red Puppy* (Bridwell, 1998). Other children sat on my lap, and on the floor around us. I think many of them knew this familiar story, but they seemed to enjoy hearing it again. When Clifford began to grow in leaps and bounds from a tiny puppy to a huge red dog, Anita said, "Wouldn't it be funny if Clifford grew right up to God?" Bob added, "Or if he grew up to where there was no oxygen and he couldn't breathe. Then he would die." (Field notes, November 7, 2002)

Bob had a quirky sense of humour, but he also had an earnestness about him that was quite endearing.

> I sat beside Bob on the carpet one morning at calendar time. It was Rob's turn to stand up front and ask the calendar questions. He was asking people to guess how

> many days of school we had had. The first one he asked was James, who looked a bit surprised and hesitated a moment before guessing 99 days. This number was way off, as we had been in school about 40 days. Bob put his hand on my hand, smiled at me and whispered, "It's good to have a bit of humour now and then." Then, a moment later, he added, "We made it past a hundred last year." (Field notes, November. 12, 2002)

Bob seemed quick to think critically and to challenge ideas when he had alternatives in mind. I found his propensity to question and wonder quite exciting.

> During morning message in early December, five new words were introduced for the word wall, as they are each week. One of the words was "dear." Laura asked the children to come up with sentences for each word. For "dear", Bruce said, "I'll be your dear, if you'll be my sweetheart." This caused lots of giggles. Laura then asked for a sentence about the animal "deer" and Bob said, "I saw a deer running across the prairie." Laura drew a deer, and Bob added, "If you are drawing a deer with antlers, it must be male." Laura was not sure about this, and said that she has read that both male and female deer have antlers, but only males lose theirs in winter. This means, she continued, that Santa's reindeer must all be female. The class found this idea rather interesting, and there was some laughter. Bob, however, came up with a different possibility. "Or perhaps reindeer are a different race (of deer)," he pondered. (Field notes, December 9, 2002)

In this field note, as in many other cases, Bob shared his own ideas about the world around him, clearly pleased to have space to wonder aloud. Most children in the class were not talking in this way in class; Bob stood out as someone willing to take a risk, speaking his thoughts and claiming space for a potential conversation.

Puzzles About Bob's Writing

On October 21st, 2002, I was in the classroom for journal time, and I happened to watch Bob at work, or trying to work. He was not writing anything down, while most of the children, even the Grade 1s, were busy scribbling or drawing in brand new journals. Talk was not encouraged at this time of the school day. I asked Bob a couple of times if he had any ideas for his journal topic. He happily told me about his weekend at his grandfather's farm. When I came back a few minutes later, still nothing was on paper. Later, I asked Laura about Bob's writing and she told me that she thinks he may have a learning disability that prevents him from being able to write easily. She said she would like to have him tested.

> Bob sat for journal time without writing anything but the date. Finally, he wrote a couple of lines: "I like snow. I want to play in the snow." When I think of the thoughtful comments Bob makes, and the way he can conceptualize and discuss so many things orally, I see there is a pretty big gap between what he knows and what he can write down on paper. I wonder if he is frustrated by this. (Field notes, October 21, 2002)

Just before Halloween, I sat with Bob and Rosie at a Halloween writing station, as they each wrote a short piece. Bob wanted to write about a vampire. He put the title, "A Vampire," at the top of the page. I helped him spell vampire. We looked for some of the words he wanted in his animated dictionary. Other words we found on the word wall. His story read, "A vampire lived in a haunted house. Some people saw him. They wanted to kill him." Writing this was a big job for Bob. He was quite pleased with accomplishing this writing. Rosie had written a Halloween poem, and she went off to show it to Laura. Bob went to show his too, but she did not have time to look at it just then (Field notes, October 30, 2002).

Bob seemed to enjoy having someone to share his work with; maybe writing with me was one way of supporting Bob as a writer. We did this several times, although it was a somewhat covert action on my part. Laura preferred the children to work independently on writing. By December 2002, Bob was still finding writing difficult, but he seemed to like sharing his attempts with me.

> Bob was one of the last to finish his journal; he took a very long time to get started. He came over to me, seated near the front at a child's desk, writing, and asked me to read his journal. I did, and as he read, he placed his hand lightly on my back. This gesture makes him seem younger to me than his sometimes sophisticated thinking causes me to think of him. (Field notes, December 9, 2002)

The memory of Bob's hand on my back in that small moment reminds me of the many ways that we gradually moved toward trust in each other in our relationship. I was grateful for these moments that showed me how my relationship with Bob was one where he felt comfortable to bring his story to live by as a warm, affectionate seven year old into a moment like this with me. As we began to know each other, small gestures like this helped me understand Bob more deeply. It would have been easy, in that busy classroom, to see Bob as a humorous, independent child, and to stop there. Attending to this aspect of our relationship enabled me to engage in seeing big (Greene, 1995), to see Bob in his particularity and to see him in relation with me and with others, in ways I might have missed.

Other Puzzles

At Ravine School, there was a Community Partners Reading Program in place, where people from the surrounding community would come into the school to read with small groups of children in the library or in empty classrooms during the school day. In September, the children were all given forms to take home, asking who would be able to read with the child at home. Children brought the forms back quite quickly, with mostly parents, but also grandparents, older siblings, aunts, and uncles signed up to read with them on a regular basis. Those children who did not bring back a form, or those who brought one back stating that no one at home could read with them, became members of groups who would be pulled from class and read to by community volunteers who came into the school.

In Laura's class, most of the children had someone to read with them at home. Fareda and Bob were the two who didn't bring back the forms, so Laura arranged for them to be read to by Barb, Cara's mother, who came in weekly to volunteer. Laura chose a short, simple novel for this read-aloud, *The Littles* (Peterson, 1993). I wondered whether Bob's form made it home to his mother, because when I talked with her on the phone, a few days later, she told me she was reading Book Two of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Tolkien, 1954/1999) with Bob each night. She talked about how much he loved being read to, and how well he was able to comprehend this fairly complex and lengthy novel (Field notes, October 11, 2002). I was struck by the irony that Bob was being storied by the school as a child to whom no one read at home, when in fact he and his mother were sharing the rich experience of reading this challenging novel together. He had not returned his form, so he was placed in the Community Partners Reading Program, something that was clearly unnecessary for him. I wonder about how often I have pencilled a child into a school program because of missing forms or inaccurate paperwork, not taking time to consider my knowing of that child and his learning needs. Being part of the Reading Program might not have been a negative thing, except it meant that Bob missed things in the classroom that he might have enjoyed.

> Laura read a book called *Alexander, Who's Not (Do You Hear Me? I Mean It!) Going to Move* (Viorst, 1998) to the class this morning. She mentioned to me earlier that Bob is going to be moving to a new house soon, as are several other children in the class. That is why she chose this book, she said. As she began to read, Laura noticed that Bob was not there. Then she remembered that she had sent Bob and Fareda to the library with Cara's mom, as part of the Community Partners Reading Program. Bob and Fareda do not have someone to read at home with them, apparently. They were reading the book *The Littles*. They came back to the class partway through the story. (Field notes, October 2, 2002)

The book chosen especially with Bob in mind was not one that he would have a chance to listen to, since he was in the library with another reading group. This was unfortunate, but the larger issues seemed to me to be that Bob did not have any choice about the book he was being read in the Community Partners Reading Program, and he *was* being read to regularly at home in any case. Because the form was not returned to the school, he was placed in a program for which he did not fit the criteria. Why was Bob in the Community Partners Reading Program? How well did people at school know Bob if they did not know his readings habits at home? Why did the form seem to have more importance than the knowing his teacher had of him?

In the classroom, Bob enjoyed the literature that was read aloud, and he attended to stories carefully.

> When I arrived in Laura's classroom today, I noticed Bob's nice haircut, as Laura went over the agenda for the day. Laura mentioned that they were going to do something with the book *Knots on a Counting Rope* (Martin & Archambault, 1987) this afternoon. She asked if anyone remembered the name of the boy in the book, which they had read a few weeks ago. Kelsie said, "Boy," and Laura agreed that this was what his grandfather called him. Then she asked if anyone else remembered his full name. Bob did. He said, "The Boy of the Blue Horses." He spoke a bit shyly, as if slightly embarrassed about recalling easily what no one else could. (Field notes, October 21, 2002)

I saw Bob engaging fully with books we shared, making strong connections between the book and his own life. He seemed to enjoy extending the text, creating his own, often humorous, version.

I read *Five Creatures* (Jenkins, 2001) to Bob and three other children in the library that same day. It is a humorous book, with five family members (three family pets included) shown doing different things on each double page. An example of the text is: "Four creatures who liked fish, two who liked to read, and one who was learning to." The children enjoyed figuring out who the text referred to on each page. At the end of the book, we made up some of our own, for our own families. Cara said there were four who liked pizza at her house, and three who liked lasagna. Bob said there were seven who liked fish at his house, and he went on to describe with comic detail the pets at his house and at his neighbour's. (Field notes, October 21, 2002)

I read Bob a paragraph from my writing about the previous fall, in which he had told me that his mother was reading the second of the *Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954/1999) books with him. Bob picked up on this, and let me know that he had seen the movie that is based on the first book. He launched into a monologue in which he narrated a scene from the first book/movie "word for word, in the British voice of the movie narrator, the part where Isildur dies and the ring falls and Gollum finds it. He slipped right into the role as he was talking, so that for a moment I wondered what he was doing, as his voice changed and he spoke so formally." (Field notes, June 11, 2003, p. 2)

> I was impressed with Bob's memory, and also intrigued that he chose a scene in which a formidable sword (Isildur's father's sword) and a powerful ring ("one ring to rule them all") were central to the story. Bob has talked numerous times about his interest in metals and precious jewels, and his perspective on this story seemed to draw upon this interest. (Field note, June 12, 2003)

Seeing Bob's interactions with books in school, and knowing of his reading times at home with his mother, I understood Bob as a creative, complex, thoughtful person who had many strengths. I wondered at how he was storied as a low-achieving student in the class who might need to be tested and labelled.

Bob's Special Place

After Laura read *Alexander, Who's Not (Do You Hear Me? I Mean It!) Going to Move* (Viorst, 1998) to the class (October 2, 2002), she talked about some of the special places that Alexander had to say goodbye to before moving out of his old home. She asked the class if they have some special places around their homes and invited the children to get "knee to knee" with their buddy and talk about some of their special places. Bob, sitting near me with his buddy, talked about his grandfather's farm and the pond at the farm. Bob mentioned this farm several times to me and to others when I've been around. He described wagon rides with his grandfather, father, brother, and sister. He told me how they can visit the farm only in the spring and summer, as it is too cold in the winter.

Anne: Do you go out to the farm every weekend?

> Bob: No, it's not that, it's not the kind of farm you're thinking of. No one lives there.
>
> Anne: I remember you telling us that it's only in the summer that you go there. You wouldn't go there when it's really cold.
>
> Bob: Yeah, I wouldn't go there this weekend. It's too cold. We shut it off on September 1st.
>
> Anne: Oh, OK. So you don't go there past then.
>
> Bob: And we make sure all the water's turned off and guess what.
>
> Anne: What?
>
> Bob: We have a river. There are deer and bears and we used to take our dog, Woody. (Transcripts, November 12, 2002)

He talked about how this was his grandfather's farm and how his grandfather was doctor and a very wonderful man. Bob wants to be a doctor when he grows up. His grandfather's name is Jim Hartley. H-A-R-T-L-E-Y, he spelled it aloud for me, for emphasis. Bob said that the nurses who work with him say that Jim Hartley is a very wonderful man. It seems evident that Bob admires his grandfather very much and wants to emulate him. Perhaps that is why Bob wants to be a doctor too.

In mid-November, I asked Bob and each of the children in the lunchtime book group, one at a time, if they would like to tell me a story which I would scribe for them. Bob quickly agreed, and told about visiting his grandfather's farm. This is the story he told:

> One time at the farm, my grandfather asked my brother and me to make a lamp. We worked on it in the shed, and we used electrical things to make it. I melted metal to make the lamp. My grandfather gave me a special little lighter to use. I already had the cord and the light fixture. I also put some glass on it. My brother helped me make the lamp. He did one part and then I did the other. We worked on the workbench in the shed. We've already made a couple of lamps for the shed. They use batteries, and they shine light up, and we've got a little mirror on the ceiling so then all of the light goes in every single direction (Scribed story, November 12, 2002)

From this story, and from the frequent mentions Bob made of the farm, I began to see that this really was Bob's special place, a place that held many happy memories for him. At the beginning of the school year, Laura had mentioned that Bob's parents were separating, and Bob was moving to a new house. I wondered if the farm memories had greater importance for him this year, in this time of transition.

About Scribing for Bob

Scribing this story for Bob provided me with a window into his world (Galda, 1998), enabling me to imagine one of his special places and his story to live by as a creative, competent child with a grandfather to whom he felt very close. The following transcript excerpt is from when Bob was explaining to me how there was a mirror in the lamp he was making in his grandfather's shed, as I scribed for him.

Bob: And I got the metal all around it and some of the glass inside. Then I could put a little bit of a lever so it would only shine one way.

Anne: (writing as we talked) All right, so this was a bit of a mirror, this glass?…Oops, I wrote "you" instead of "I."

Bob: Mirror, yeah…a little bit of a mirror on to it.

Anne: To reflect back?...ok.

Bob: Sometimes I understand what you're writing.

Anne: Pardon?

Bob: I know the words that you're writing.

Anne: Yes, I'm writing the words that you said. (Transcript, November 12, 2002)

Bob's recognition of his words in my writing (printing) indicated to me that this might be a way to encourage Bob in his own writing. If he and I were to write collaboratively, maybe he would begin to feel he could write about his narratives of experience, without being overwhelmed by the technical demands of writing. Bob enjoyed having me scribe this story and was quite pleased with the result. When he wrote on his own, he could not yet come close to expressing all that was in his mind. After thinking up a title (The Farm), and drawing a picture of the work shed, Bob wanted to add one more thing to his story.

Anne: And I'm going to put the date over here. November 12th, so we remember when we made this story.

Bob: Wait a sec. How about we flip it over and then, and then, the back cover…something about me.

Anne: Well, that's a great idea. You mean like in a book when you tell about the author?

Bob: Yeah!

Anne: OK, what will we say about you?

Bob: My birthday's November 13th.

Anne: Wow. That's tomorrow. Is your birthday tomorrow really? Whoa, I didn't know that! That's exciting. Now what else can we say?

Bob: Why don't we say that this is a true story?

Anne: That's a good way to put it.

Bob: We could say I like to take apart things…like my brother. Also, I like to read *The Two Towers*.

Anne: (writing) Ok, he likes to read *The Two Towers*, by…Do you remember that guy's name? Tolkien, right? *The Lord of the Rings* books…

Bob: Actually, I think he wrote one book and then he said, "Oh, this is going to be too long. So then he broke it into three books. (Transcript, November 12, 2002)

Bob's comments here, and the fact that he wanted to add an author's paragraph, suggested to me that Bob saw himself as having stories to share, and when provided with the space to tell his stories, he willingly did so. His theory on why Tolkien made *Lord of the Rings* (1999) into a trilogy perhaps helped him figure out how authors come to write more than one book. Bob was eager to inquire into books and authors in which he was interested, a strength I saw as I came to know him.

Lunchtime Book Conversations with Bob

When I read *Everybody Needs a Rock* (Baylor, 1974) to the lunchtime group on November 7, 2002, Bob showed his interest in the different kinds of rocks I brought in to share with the group. He mentioned going to a museum with his family where he saw rocks like the shiny purple amethyst from the Bay of Fundy in my collection. I explained that the outside of a rock might appear dull and grey and not very interesting, but that when you cracked open the geode, it might have amethyst inside it. Bob asked if you would use a hammer to crack it open, and I agreed that you could. He was very attentive and intrigued by this notion.

As I finished reading the book, I suggested that maybe some of the children might bring rocks in to share next week. Bob was enthusiastic. "I have a lot of rocks, in my driveway, because I live on a farm. Guess what? There's billions of them. I can bring at least one hundred rocks" (Transcripts, November 7, 2002, p. 25). Later in our conversation, as he was drawing (tracing the outlines of some of the rocks and naming them islands), Bob proposed that he could get some rocks from outer space. He said he would go to the moon, and Mars, to find rocks, and that each one of them would be worth at least a billion dollars. This led him to consider how lucrative this project might be. "And then guess what! Then we'd collect every single rock that was loose that we could find, and then we'd be billionaires!" (Transcripts, November 7, 2002, p. 35).

Bob continued to think about gathering rocks in outer space as he drew his islands with colorful markers. "After I catch the asteroids, then I'm going to catch a star. Did you know stars are actually planets?" I asked him to clarify for me what asteroids are. "Are they those rocks that fly through space?" "Yeah," Bob replied. "They're space rocks. It's like…space junk. United space junk" (Transcripts, November 7, 2002, p. 36). This thought then led Bob to an idea that touched on a favourite topic of his, making things with metal. "Space junk is made of metal…If you took a diamond and you melted it down onto metal then it would stick on and you could make a saw or something with it. Or a sword." I wonder if Bob was referring here to the notion that diamonds make very sharp cutting edges. He didn't pursue this idea, but it does reflect an interest that arose quite often, an interest in making metal objects, like the lamp in the scribed story.

The following illustrates the interest Bob had in things mechanical, which seemed connected with his passion for rocks, minerals, and metal objects.

> When I brought my camera to school the next week to take some photos in our lunchtime group, Bob saw similarities between my camera and his mother's. "Guess what? My mom has a camera that's even bigger than yours. It's got the same things as yours, the flash" (Transcripts, November 4, 2002, p. 26). Bob was also intrigued with the tape recorder I used to record our conversations. One day in November I told the group ruefully about how I mistakenly set the tape recorder to double time the previous week, so that our voices sounded really high and really fast, like the Chipmunks. "I want to set it to triple time," Bob said excitedly. "Yeah, that would be even faster, wouldn't it, Bob?" I responded. "No," he said assuredly, "Triple time you wouldn't even hear the voices because they're going so fast" (Transcripts, November 21, 2002, p. 1). A few weeks later, Bob was still playing with the idea of speeding up our voices on the tape recorder.

> In the middle of reading *Crow Boy* (Yashima, 1983), Bob pointed at the tape recorder and asked, "Hey, what if that thing was on triple time? We couldn't hear our voices." (Transcripts, December 5, 2002, p. 17)

I chose the book *Everybody Needs a Rock* (Baylor, 1974) to read with the lunchtime group because I knew that Bob had an interest in rocks and minerals. He created a collage earlier in the fall with a photo of his face in the centre and many strands of jewellery surrounding the photo. He also drew his hands with pictures of jewels glued on like bracelets and rings. Bob talked with me about his rock collection and a special rock his mother had given him, a pearl. When we read this book, and I brought in some rocks from my own collection, Bob was very animated in his response, drawing pictures round the rocks, and creating his own story about finding rocks in outer space and becoming a billionaire. He began to imagine how to make a sword using the rocks he might find in outer space. I began to see that Bob had twin passions, one for rocks and minerals, and one for designing and creating metal objects, like the lamps at his grandfather's farm. His fascination with the mechanics of cameras and tape recorders seemed to be an extension of these passions. As I continued to spend time with Bob, I saw that he often made connections between these passions and the books we read or activities in which we engaged.

In mid-November we read a book called *A Quiet Place*, by Douglas Wood (2002), in our lunchtime group. The book poetically describes and illustrates a variety of places one might go when looking for quiet, some far away and some closer to home. One quiet place Wood conjures for the reader is the forest. "You might look in the woods. You might find an old stump for a chair or a mossy log for a couch in a green mansion of shadows and sunbeams. It's not really quiet of course. Blue jays scream warnings, and wind sings in the leaves. But it feels quiet. And you can be a timber wolf, the gray ghost of the forest. The woods could be your quiet place" (p. 7). After I read this page aloud to the children, Bob added, "and maybe you could be like a monkey and climb a tree, like I always do. There's a kind of little tree at my new house and it splits up into two halves right about…here. So I just climb up, I jump and I reach it. I keep climbing and climbing. I cling on to the bark to hold me up. And then guess what? I hit the top. That's my kind of quiet place" (Transcripts, November 21, 2002, p. 31). A moment later, Bob said, "When I was at my old house there was a big tree and I climbed all the way to the top." This reminded me that Bob's parents had recently separated and he moved, with his mother, to another house. I wondered if he missed the big tree and other things from his old house. Perhaps the tree at his new house, which he said is his kind of quiet place, served to keep the memory of the big tree at his old house alive for him.

As I read a little further in the transcripts of our conversation on the day we read *A Quiet Place* (Wood, 2002), I remembered the active way in which Bob and James expressed their understanding of another landscape. We had just read the page about the desert. "The desert could be your quiet place" (p. 11). The large cactus in the illustration led us to talk about cacti. James said he could protect himself like a cactus, by making himself all spiky. Immediately, James and Bob acted out a scene with James becoming a spiky cactus, and Bob a wild boar, trying to eat him. "Because there are pigs in the desert that are very furry and they, they just break the cactus or kill the cactus" (Transcripts, November 21, 2002, p. 35). Their knowing appeared so embodied, and they were so enthusiastic in their representation of desert life.

Tension #1: Making Space for Stories to Live By

As I read this transcript, I thought about how engaged these two were in this setting, and how they often appeared to be quite the opposite in whole group settings in the classroom. Bob was often seen as a source of disruption in class, because he answered questions in humorous ways, and because he could be quite talkative (Field notes, September 3, September 5, September 18, September 26, October 21, 2002). James, on the other hand, was usually on the margins of classroom activities, and struggled to complete many tasks, especially those involving pencil and paper (Field notes, September 12, September 19, September 26, 2002). Thinking about James and Bob in the lunchtime book group setting, actively contributing to the conversations in constructive ways, I wondered how to encourage a spill-over of this engagement into the life of the classroom. It seemed that these children had little space in the classroom to bring in their own passions, the stories of things closest to their hearts, the things they were so enthusiastic about.

I smiled at a turn of phrase that could only belong to Bob. "I once drank cactus juice" (Transcripts, November 21, 2002, p. 31). He went on to tell us that it looked like water, but it actually tasted "like ordinary orange juice." Whether Bob really has tasted cactus juice or not is questionable, but, for me, his ability to wonder about the world around him, to build on his knowing, and to continually consider so many possibilities, is breath-taking. Immediately after this statement, James offered to tell us why this landscape is called the desert. "It's called desert because it doesn't get enough water," he announced with certainty. This led Bob to say, "I know why a hamburger is called a hamburger. It's because hamburgers are made in a place called Hamburg." Bob told us he had been to Hamburg himself. He was personalizing and fictionalizing his knowing in an intriguing way, something I had begun to notice in our lunchtime book group. Bob inserted himself into his explanation about how hamburgers came to be named, personalizing his account by saying he had been to Hamburg himself. He was fictionalizing the explanation, creating a fiction that placed him centrally in the story. This was an occurrence I began to see occasionally in our conversations.

The next week, Bob and I read the ending of the book, *A Quiet Place* (Wood, 2002) in the library, just the two of us. We had not had a chance to finish it at lunch the week before, and Bob had been away, sick. Bob was quieter on this day, but still full of wonders. On one page is a cave filled with icicles, stalactites, and stalagmites. "A cave could be your quiet place" (p. 15). Bob told me he would like to have some of the icicles. I asked him why and he replied, matter-of-factly, "Those are diamonds" (Transcripts, November 27, 2002, p. 1).

Then we came to the page with illustrations of the planets and a rocket ship ["The library could be your quiet place" (p. 23)]. Bob said that the planet the rocket ship was on is Mars. "And someday, Mars might be able to support life!" he told me excitedly. I asked Bob what the name of another planet in the picture was, and he said, "I won't say the name of it, because it's rude." I was fairly sure this planet was Saturn, so I pointed out the rings. "Oh well," I said, "I think you're thinking of another one. This one is Saturn, with the ring around it. I know the one you're thinking of; it's probably this one beside it." Bob was adamant. "No, no, no. I mean this one with the tilted rings, that looks like that (pointing to the first planet)." I was not ready to admit that I might be wrong. "Well, I think you're thinking of Uranus (Bob nods). And it doesn't have rings, does it?"

"It does, it does," Bob exclaimed. "And the ice rings are from the top to the bottom. I can even show you in the encyclopaedia." We got an encyclopaedia and looked at the rather old pictures of planets and were not helped much by this.

Bob's knowing was wide-ranging, and he was quite confident in what he knew, in this conversation with me. What a difference from the uncertain child who wrote almost nothing in his journal and as little as he could in other assignments. Bob fully believed he knew which planet was Uranus (as did I), and he knew that he could make a play on words, with his statement, "I won't say the name of it, because it's rude." He also knew where to go to look for confirmation that this planet was Uranus, in the encyclopedia. Bob expressed his knowing confidently and clearly in our exchange. Bob's conduct in this encounter, where he does not hesitate to proclaim his knowing, stands in contrast to the ways I saw Bob acting in class, participating minimally and passively in activities, particularly those that involved pencil and paper. Bob tended to act out in class, questioning or challenging, actions that often placed him in opposition to his teacher. I wondered how Bob might share some of his knowing and feel more confident and less oppositional in class.

Bob Bumping up Against School Stories

Bob seemed to come into conflict with Laura, as he challenged and questioned the agenda. Laura mentioned that she found Bob's conduct difficult to manage (Transcripts, October 2, 2002).

> During calendar time, I walked to the front of the classroom to help Barbie and I missed a bit of what was happening on the carpet at the back. Laura was scolding Bob. He seemed to be in trouble over doing something he shouldn't during the counting of the days of school. "Do you want to be the cause of the class not getting to… [I missed this part]… because of your behaviour?" (Field notes, May 14, 2003)

Bob sometimes talked when he shouldn't (at calendar time or during Morning Message) or made comments that provoked Laura because they seemed to challenge her authority.

> Laura had the children come to the carpet for a brainstorming session about the question "What do you want to learn at school?" She wrote their answers on chart paper. Ellen said, "To paint." Josh said, "To read more." Kayla said, "To write more words." Bob said, "To yell." "Should we write that on the paper?" asked Laura. "No." She did not write down Bob's response. (Field notes, September 4, 2002)

Bob seemed to want to resist the school story of what a good student does and says. He often tried to use humour in his responses in the classroom. Sometimes his humour was not appreciated and he was reprimanded, as in the above example. Bob liked to challenge Laura, as in the following example.

> At 9:20 am, after the Morning Message, we began an activity called Colour Fun. Laura handed out the food place mats and told the class we would be mixing colours today, but there would also be food. There was a hum of excitement. The food would be Jell-o. Laura had three colours of Jell-o: red, blue, and yellow. We would each get to mix some in sandwich bags. More excitement. Laura had a colour wheel at the front and talked about the colours we would make. She said that some colours represent certain tastes. What food might yellow be? "Lemon," said Kelsie. Bob said, "Actually, lemons make a white colour, not yellow." Laura agreed. "That's right," she said. "What do they add to make food like Jell-o yellow?" Bob answered quietly, "Food colouring." I think that it is less fun for him when Laura agrees with him. A few minutes later, Bob was holding his three bags of mixed Jell-o in one hand as I walked by his desk. I quietly said to him, "Three bags full." He repeated this and smiled. (Field notes, May 14, 2003)

In this field note, Bob told his teacher that real lemons do not actually make a yellow colour, although the lemon Jell-o is bright yellow. In this case, Laura agreed with Bob and extended his thinking, asking what makes the Jell-o yellow. I sensed that Bob seemed slightly deflated that Laura concurred with him. The spark did not ignite and there was no moment of tension.

Tension # 2: I Learned Nothing

> **The children were to do a sheet about the Jell-o experiment, which involved drawing a picture of what happened, and then writing about 1) what you did**

> and 2) what you learned. There were about three lines for each answer. As I walked among the desks, I saw most children working away on this. Bob was sitting looking at his page, and I glanced at it too. For the "what have you learned" question, he had written in upper case letters, NOTHING. I mentioned that this might not be the answer Miss Green is looking for and that he might want to change it. He looked at me seriously, and remained still. He wasn't laughing about this or showing it to anyone else. I wondered what was going through his head. I'm sure he already did know what colors the Jell-o would turn when mixed, so he probably hadn't learned something new there…so why wasn't he allowed to say so…I am implicated in this, I realize. I am so much a part of this school story, the story that says that fulfilling teacher's expectations is more important than saying what you really think. (Field notes, May 14, 2003)

In this field note, Bob again challenged the notion of what it means to be a good student, writing his answer boldly "Nothing" in response to the question "What have you learned?" As I reflected on this incident later, I was struck by Bob's honesty and courage. No one else was doing anything remotely like this and he did not have support or encouragement from other children in the class. He was making a solitary stand. He may again have been attempting to create a situation of tension with Laura, but it seemed to me that Bob was simply being open in writing that he had learned nothing. I was aware of my unease, my worry that he might be storied negatively. I wanted Bob to back down, to erase his response, to write something more acceptable. I recognized, in that moment, how fraught with contradictions my own stance as a researcher in that classroom was, as I struggled with wanting to "help" make Bob over into a "good student." I was, on one hand, trying to create spaces for children to play and work with their stories to live by, through the lunchtime book group and other time I spent with them in school. On the other hand, I found myself wanting to make Bob over, to position him differently in the classroom, to step in and interrupt the school story of who Bob was, but also Bob's own story of who he was, his story to live by. I made one comment to Bob about changing his response, and as soon as I did that, it was like a light bulb went on in my head, and I realized the direction I was headed. It was not the place I wanted to go at all with Bob or any of the children, yet there I was.

The tensions in this story are multiple. Bob was bumping against the school story of a good student by answering "Nothing" as a response to the question about what he had learned. In my knowing of the school story, good students work to please their teachers rather than say what they really think. Good teachers, correspondingly, encourage students to be docile and please others. A potential tension was brewing between Bob and his teacher, who would not be pleased with his answer. As well, my words to Bob revealed a place of tension in my relationship with Bob, one I had not seen before. Why did I want to help Bob come up with a more acceptable answer? I fell into the school story of a good teacher, trying to help Bob become a good student, at the very moment when Bob was providing a glimpse of an alternative way to live in school, by saying what he really thought.

A Letter to Bob

In October of 2003, more than a year after I began to spend time with Bob, I found myself writing him a letter, from my new home in Nova Scotia, far from Ravine Elementary School. I hadn't planned to write to Bob but, as I spent time with my field notes and transcripts, I missed him and the other children from the lunchtime book group, so I did what I often do when I miss someone, I wrote a letter. Once I started, I found I had many things I wanted to ask him about. I was able to read this letter to Bob in a visit to the school in November, 2003.

October 23, 2003

Dear Bob,

When we first sat down together in the library at school last May, our feet dangling over the steps at the edge of the pit, we were the only ones in the room. It was the first time for us to have a visit in four months because I had been away in Nova Scotia. We sat side by side to read a couple of pages of my writing about you. I read aloud and you commented on the words I had written. The piece I read was about our shared reading of Everybody Needs a Rock, *(Baylor, 1974). Before I began to read, we talked about the idea that someday other people might be reading some of what I wrote about us.*

I asked you about what name you would like me to use for you in my writing. I suggested that you pick a name that starts with the same letter as your real name, but you *did not like this idea. Do you remember how you were concerned about other people knowing who you were in my writing? You told me that Fareda, James, and Julie would know who you were, and I agreed that they would. You thought that perhaps your teacher and principal would know who you were as well, and I conceded that this was true too. You decided against a name that starts with the same letter as your real name, to make it less likely that you would be identified. "It would be best if I had another letter for my name," you said (Transcripts, May 7, 2003, p. 1). You ended up choosing Bob as your pseudonym, a name that is very different from your own. It took me some time to get used to this name for you, but you were quite certain that this was the name for you. You are helping me think about this idea of why we change the names of the people we write about in our research. It is an important issue, and you make me think about who gets to make these decisions. I must admit that at first, I did not think you would be concerned about it, and I even thought that maybe I could just choose a name for you. Are you still happy with your pseudonym, Bob?*

After we discussed the name issue, I began to read to you what I wrote about the day we read Everybody Needs a Rock *(Baylor, 1974). As I read, you responded by moving into the conversational space where we had been that day in November, when you had wanted to go to Mars and bring back rocks to sell for a billion dollars each. You asked me if I knew that some day there will be people living on Mars, and that you would like to be one of the first to try it. "I'll tell my dad, Don't mind if I don't come back in a couple of years!" (Transcripts, May 7, 2003, p. 4). Then, as I read on about you collecting rocks and metal "space junk" (Transcripts, May 7, 2003, p. 4), you quickly* *gravitated toward one of your favourite topics in our conversations, the many amazing things that minerals and metal objects can do. "I just want to say that diamonds can do many things. Like some people might…they might melt diamond and use it for a bullet…if they found a really, really, really big and strong pot" (Transcripts, May 7, 2003, p. 4). When I wondered how hot a fire would have to be to melt diamonds, you told me it would have to be even hotter than white hot, "Double white hot, maybe...that would be really strong" (Transcripts, May 7, 2003, p. 5). You speculated about how valuable a gold sword with a diamond blade would be, and how very sharp it would be (Field notes, May 7, 2003, p. 5).*

As we were talking, you gradually moved closer to me, so that you were almost whispering directly into my ear. As I looked around I saw that Amit, Chandra's grandmother, who works in the library, was moving closer and closer to us, as she re-shelved books. I think you were whispering in my ear partly because you wanted this to be a private talk between you and me, without anyone else listening. I also think that as you grew more excited about the topic, you drew closer to share your words and your enthusiasm with me. I was glad to be there to share this moment with you. I wonder about some of your memories of this and other conversations we've had. You probably don't remember the same things that I do. What things do you recall from that day?

As we meandered through the book Everybody Needs a Rock *(Baylor, 1974), stopping to talk on most pages, you told me, in whispers, about your mother's rock collection and that she has all the birthstones. She had even given you a pearl from this collection. You also have a special rock that you keep at your dad's house, in a special* *place so it won't get lost (Field notes, May 7, 2003, p. 4). I wonder why rocks and minerals have such an allure for you, Bob. In the collage you made of yourself in school, back in the fall, you surrounded your photograph with all the glittering gold and jewellery you could find in magazines. You cut out bracelets, necklaces, rings, and more, and glued them around the image of you. It was an amazing collage. Do you remember that?*

One morning in May, we went around the outside of the school and took some photographs. I handed you the camera as we went outside and you immediately began to examine it to see how the flash worked and where the batteries were stored. You told me it was a good thing your brother Peter wasn't with us. "He could take, he can take anything he wants apart. That's why I don't have any remote control cars. Neither does he. We used to have like 25 of them. Peter knows how to take stuff apart. Never give him a camera like this and a screwdriver. In five seconds that thing would be in a million pieces" (Transcripts, May 15, 2003, p. 5). I asked you if Peter learned how to put things back together that he had taken apart, and you shook your head. "No, he still doesn't know how…and I don't blame him," you said solemnly. It seems to me that you and your brother both have lots of curiosity and are interested in how things work. I wonder if you have made anything recently, like the lamp you made with your brother at the farm.

Does your brother share your fascination with rocks and minerals? Or your attentiveness to language and word play? After you had taken several pictures, you turned to me and ask, "What's the best way to capture something?" I did not know, so you gave me the answer, "On film" (Transcripts, May 15, 2003, p. 7). You have a store of jokes and *riddles ready for many occasions. A little later you decided to push things a little, as I have seen you do so often in class, and told me a slightly rude joke about an elephant. When I replied that I thought the elephant joke is a bit impolite, you jumped right into a second elephant joke, one that was not indecorous in any way. You make me think about what's acceptable in school and what's not, Bob. I was quick to fall into a familiar position in that situation (to tell you that the joke was rude, in good teacherly fashion) and you were aware of your position too (room to push but not too far). Consider that moment alongside the moment when you told me about your mother's rock collection, as we sat close to each other in the library. We were able to connect in an authentic way during that conversation. We found a space to move in, away from the teacher/researcher/student positionings we sometimes fall into. I think about how we move in and out of spaces, sometimes closer to talking about our own stories to live by and other times stuck in positions like that of teacher and student. Do you see that too?*

Thanks for sharing your stories with me, Bob. You have helped me think about who I am and who you are in lots of different ways. I have learned much from you.
Love, Anne

As I read this to Bob and we stopped and talked about various parts of the letter along the way, Bob made some changes in what I had written. Instead of melting diamonds in a big pot, he told me during this reading of the letter that he had decided diamonds should be melted directly in the fire. He actually took my pen and crossed out the words, "really, really big pot." Bob laughed about the part about his brother taking things apart. After I read the piece about him moving over to sit closer to me and whisper in my ear, he gradually began to do that again during *this* conversation. Bob told me more jokes after I read him the last part of the letter, about him telling me the elephant jokes last spring.

After I shared this letter with Bob, it struck me that we have an ongoing relationship that enables us to know each other in ways that I have rarely known a child, except for my own children, before. We can be apart for a few months, while I am in Nova Scotia, and then when I return to Ravine Elementary, we can reconnect and pick up the threads of our relationship and our conversations, moving quickly into tellings and retellings of ourselves, aided, I think, by the writing I bring to share.

This intimate knowing I had of Bob seemed not to fit with the school stories being told of Bob. The school storied Bob as having difficulties with writing and as less than cooperative in class. I saw the rich imagination, the quick questioning mind, and the wonderful humour and affection Bob displayed.

School Stories of Bob Bumping Against Bob's Stories to Live By

Bob was sent for testing in the spring of 2003 because, as Laura had mentioned to me from early in the school year, she perceived a gap between his verbal abilities and his performance in reading and writing at school. When I think about the amazing stories that whizzed around in his head, I wonder about how this school story (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) of Bob shaped who he was on this landscape. Bob seemed generally untroubled by the pressures on him to write more and write more correctly. However, one day in June, Bob was sitting in the school library with me to look at some photographs he had taken.

After looking at the photos, he "put his hand on my arm and said, 'You know, I'm smarter than most grown ups'" (Field notes, June 12, 2003, p. 8).

I was a little surprised at this sudden turn in the conversation, but I agreed that he was indeed smart. Bob asked me for a piece of paper and began to draw and explain to me how viruses attack the body and how white blood cells fight them off. He was very focused as he described this process and made several checks to ensure that I was keeping up with him as he talked. "He then sketched a drawing of how the nervous system works, with each nerve connected to the spinal cord, to send messages to the brain and receive them back again" (p. 8). I asked Bob who he talks about this kind of thing with at home, and he said he talked with his dad. Having this shared interest in anatomy and physiology may be an important aspect of their relationship for this father and son. I remembered Bob's grandfather, the doctor. Perhaps he too contributed to Bob's interest in this topic. Talking with Bob today gives me another glimpse into the stories he carries of himself. I wondered if his father or grandfather told him he was "smarter than most grown ups." I wonder if he will be able to continue to hold on to that story as he meets with school pressures to be smart in one prescribed way.

Tension #3: Interruptions in Bob's Stories to Live By

Although I found Bob, at age seven, an articulate child who was deeply interested in the world around him and his connections with it, able to engage with literature and with other people, at school he was storied as having learning difficulties and as too talkative. Rather than taking note of the quite sophisticated

ways Bob used language and literacy, the focus seemed to be upon the fact that Bob was not yet writing fluently. Rather than draw on Bob's strengths to help him improve his writing, the plan was to have him tested and possibly given a label such as learning disabled, with all that it entails. Experiencing this alongside Bob, tensions arose for me, as I saw the institutional narrative of testing and remediation affecting lives like Bob's, lives which would be changed by this action. Throughout my first year at Ravine Elementary, I sometimes wondered whether Bob's story to live by was being interrupted by the school story of him. Was he aware of this story and its negative implications for who he was and who he was becoming? After Bob told me in June 2003 about being smarter than most grown ups, I felt he was working hard to maintain his story to live by in the face of this interruption the school story forced upon him. What will the next years of Bob's schooling be like? Will he be able to sustain his story to live by, a story in which he is smart, funny, and knowledgeable? Or will he begin to see himself as a poor student, one who will remain on the margins of academic success? How might this influence the paths he takes on his journey through school and beyond?

Writing a Piece of Fiction for Bob

As my time at Ravine Elementary School drew to a close, I wrote a piece of fiction for each child in the lunchtime book group, drawing on a favourite book or character as inspiration for the stories I wrote. Bob and I had several conversations about the *Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1952–57/1999) trilogy, and it seemed appropriate to use one small part of that tale to create Bob's story. One of the Hobbits, Pippin, in the second book of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Tolkien), chanced to pick up a magical stone called a palantir as it was thrown from Saruman's tower. He could not stop thinking about the stone, and later that night, he took the stone from Gandalf's bag, to look at it again. This stone had the power to allow Sauron (the evil dark lord) to see into the mind of whoever held it, to see all that person's secrets. When Pippin held the palantir, or Seeing Stone, it was as if he were transported to Sauron's castle and held captive there, while Sauron searched his mind. Playing with this idea, I wrote a story about Bob, who greatly enjoyed reading and discussing *The Lord of the Rings*. In this story, Bob finds a Seeing Stone of his own. This one is a bit different from the Seeing Stone in the book; it allows Bob to be transported to various scenes from his own life.

Using field texts from our conversations together, created during the gatherings of lunchtime book group and at other times, I wrote this fictional piece as a way of representing my knowing of Bob and some of his stories to live by, over his year in Grade 2. I wrote this piece to illustrate the multi-faceted nature of Bob's identity. One of Bob's favourite stones is the diamond, with its many sides; the diamond seems an appropriate metaphor for the many sides of Bob that I have come to know.

Bob and the Seeing Stone

It was Saturday morning, and Bob was at home, sorting through his rock collection. Bob had collected rocks for several years, and he was proud of the interesting assortment he now had. One of his favourites was the diamond his mother had given him;

it was her birthstone. Bob was seven years old and in the second grade. Sometimes he thought about taking a rock to school to show his friends, but he never actually did this, because he wanted to keep his rocks safe and not lose them.

This particular Saturday morning was the beginning of a rainy spring day, and Bob could see he was not going to be able to go outside much, so he headed to his room after breakfast to organize his collection. He took a cloth from the kitchen to polish some of the shinier stones. One that he especially liked was dark grey, and quite heavy. After he rubbed it to a lustrous silvery sheen, Bob was putting this rock back up on the shelf when it dropped from his hand and rolled away out of sight. Crawling under the edge of his bed, Bob could see the rock gleaming near the wall. Wriggling further into the dimness, Bob reached out to retrieve the rock. As he did, the light from the rock began to glow more vibrantly and Bob could see dark shapes moving in the glow within the stone.

Surprised, Bob edged closer, only to find that the shapes in the stone were becoming clearer. As he peered in, Bob saw himself and his brother working on a lamp that they had made at his grandfather's farm. They were both standing by a workbench in the shed, concentrating on their work. "Wow! I remember that day!" Bob thought. "It was so much fun. I got to use my grandfather's special lighter to melt metal to make that lamp."

But even as this thought went through his mind, the shapes in the stone began to dissolve into a glowing bluish mass, swirling and shifting. Bob tentatively placed his hand on the stone. As he did, the shapes within gradually formed a new scene. Now Bob could see himself in his classroom at school, sitting on the carpet with the other children *as his classmate Rob added the date to the big class calendar. As Bob watched closely, he found that he could actually hear what he and others were saying in the stone. Rob asked another student to guess how many days of school they had attended so far this year. The answer given was 99 days, but the right answer, as Rob noted, was 40 days. Bob could hear his own voice, whispering to his neighbour, "It's good to have a bit of humour now and then."*

Bob could not imagine why this stone was showing him scenes from his life, why he could see moments that he had almost forgotten about. He began to pull the stone out from under the bed, and as he did so, the classroom scene melted into a blur and reformed itself into another scene in a matter of seconds. It was right here, in his own bedroom! In the image in the stone, Bob was lying in bed and his mother was reading him The Two Towers, *the second* Lord of the Rings *(Tolkien, 1954–1999) book. He loved reading that book with his Mom! Bob decided to pick up the stone and take it to show his mother now. This was so amazing!*

As Bob crawled out from under the bed, the light within the stone began to fade, and as he stood up near the window, the glow faded completely. Now it looked like an ordinary grey stone again. Bob put the stone on the shelf and went to find his mother, to ask her to come to his room. A few moments later, Bob and his mother both had their heads under his bed, and Bob held the stone in his hand in the semi-darkness. Sure enough, the stone began to glow, and soon they could see shapes forming in the bluish light within the stone.

Bob's mother gasped. This time the stone showed Bob sitting in his favourite tree in their yard, the one that splits in two halves, the one that Bob could climb right to the top. This was Bob's quiet place, a place he liked to go when he needed to think. Mom whispered, "This is amazing!" Before she could say more, a new scene formed in the stone, as both she and Bob watched in awe. This time they could see Bob playing a video game on the Playstation. It was Zelda the Wind Waker, and he was so good at this game! As they watched, he beat a level and moved right up to the next one.

Just then the phone rang, so Mom left the room, and Bob started to get up to put the stone back on the shelf for now. He glanced at it once more, and this time, he saw himself, his brother and his sister all in the basement working on the machine they created out of boxes and tubing. Bob was sitting on a little green cushion, manning the controls of the machine, as the others added plastic and some wires. Bob had a lot of fun making that machine.

"OK, Mom, I'm coming." Bob heard his mother calling and reluctantly crawled out from under the bed. The stone's glow quickly faded. He placed the stone back on his shelf and ran out the bedroom door to join his family. After Bob left, the stone sat, grey and lifeless, for a few minutes. Then, it began to glow again...

Bob's Stories to Live By

In my last meeting with Bob, in late April 2004, he seemed to enjoy hearing the story *Bob and the Seeing Stone* as I read it aloud. He corrected me at one point, reminding me that he does not have a Playstation for videogames. Instead, he has a Game

Cube. This was an important distinction. Bob did not say much directly about the story after I read it, and at first I thought perhaps it had not resonated with him, that he had not seen himself in the words. As we talked, however, Bob shared a couple of aspects of his life that he never mentioned before with me. He told me that the school year was not going so well, because he had "started swearing more" (Transcripts, April 23, 2004, p. 6), and a bit later, that he has a friend who got angry and "just about killed somebody" (p. 8). This was followed by a story about somebody being "lit on fire" (p. 9). These comments were all made in a joking manner, and I think I recognize the fictionalizing that was happening here. The narratives Bob chose to tell me seemed to represent a story of himself as rough and tough, a story perhaps he wishes to promote (perhaps in response to the school story being told of him).

At the end of our conversation, Bob said "I'm worse" (p. 11), meaning he was acting worse than he had previously. He said this gleefully, as he teased me by pretending to put a book on my head. His mischievous grin and manner seemed to me to reflect an emerging story to live by for Bob, one that he perhaps imagines is more grown-up, coinciding for now alongside some of the other stories I know of him. We also talked for a bit about coal, Bob's current favourite rock, and its relationship to diamonds.

> Bob said that actually his favourite rock was coal, not diamond. I recognized this, his opening gambit for a conversation, and was glad to see this spark. I gladly took the bait and asked him about coal and its relationship to diamonds…Bob told me that his rock collection was big now. He then looked right at me and said that because his mom and dad are divorced, he (and his mom) are selling their house

> and buying another one. It will be closer to the school, he thinks. This is the first time Bob has mentioned the divorce. (Field notes, April 23, 2004, p. 7)

When Bob mentioned his parents' divorce, I was struck by the way he and I have come to this place in our conversation, in our relationship. Over the nearly two years we have been in relation, he has never talked about this, so why now? Moments earlier, I was a bit disappointed that Bob did not have much to say about the story I wrote of him. When the conversation took this turn, it occurred to me that conversations are not as linear as that. The reading of the story *Bob and the Seeing Stone* perhaps created a space for Bob to tell me a little about his parents' divorce, by illustrating the multiple aspects of his story to live by to which I am awakening (Greene, 1978). The pieces I have been reading to Bob over the almost two years of this research, about how I understand his emerging, shifting stories to live by, seem to have enabled a depth in our relationship that I find humbling. Thank you, Bob, for this gift.

Endnote: "You know, I'm smarter than most grown ups." (Bob, Field notes, May 2, 2003).

Chapter 4: Julie—Wondering and Wandering

A Different Kind of Old

The first day of school, I noticed a little girl with two small ponytails jutting from the sides of her head. Her hair was short, black, and thick, and these two ponytails stuck up quite jauntily and bounced as she walked across the room. Most of her hair was not in the elastics. Julie's ponytails brought back memories of my youngest sister, Rose, who at about the age of 5-year-old Julie, had desperately wanted ponytails in her very short blonde hair. My mother managed to gather two tiny bits of hair on either side of Rose's head and put them into elastics. Rose was delighted, even though her four older sisters teased her a bit about her "airplane wings" sticking straight out from her head. I wondered if Julie would be teased about her ponytails.

On that first day of school, most of the children did not approach me as I sat at a side table. I had introduced myself and had helped to tie Barbie's shoes, but so far, I was not a known entity in the room. Half of these children had been in Laura's one-two classroom last year, but the Grade 1 children were new to the room, and intent on their new surroundings and teacher. Laura began the day by reading a story to the class. After the book, Julie raised her hand and said, "I have a tummy ache. Mommy said I have to go home every time I have a tummy ache." Laura asked Julie's buddy to take her to get a drink of water, and Julie didn't say anything more about feeling sick for the moment.

Soon, it was time for each child to print the alphabet on lined paper. Most children got right to work on this, their first pencil and paper task of the school year. Julie left her desk and walked toward the door, ponytails bouncing. She sat at the table beside the door and announced, "I can't write ABCs." Laura spoke quietly with her and brought her back to her desk, where she picked up her pencil and printed both her first name and last name quickly, then began to print the upper case alphabet.

After recess, the class gathered on the carpeted meeting area of the classroom. Laura read a funny picture book to the children called *Parts* (Arnold, 2000), about body parts. There was lots of talk and laughter as Laura read the book. Julie wandered away from the group on the carpet, came over to the side table where I sat, and asked me what I was writing as I scribbled field notes in my new blue notebook. She stood beside me and watched me write until Laura called her back to the carpet.

I watched Julie rock herself back and forth both at her desk and on the carpet on those first days of school. I wondered if this was a way of comforting herself in the midst of her new surroundings. At recess the first day, Julie had been quite insistent that her mother was coming to pick her up and take her to the doctor. No mother appeared, and Julie said that maybe her mother was waiting for her at the outside door and that she should go check. Laura told her that if her mother came, she would either come to the classroom door or go to the office and call Julie from there. Julie did not appear convinced. Laura told me she was concerned that Julie might try to leave the school on her own.

As the first weeks of life in the classroom unfolded, Julie was quiet, on the fringes of classroom life, occasionally playing with other children, but mostly on her own. She did not participate in some activities and sometimes just sat at her desk with her head down. On other occasions, she would join in group activities, but with an air of seriousness and gravity about her. Daily, Julie would come to stand beside me and ask me what I was writing about that particular day. At the end of the second week of school, Julie said to me at lunch time, "I never gave you a hug," and she hugged me. She and I seemed drawn to each other.

> Then we did the calendar, and Laura reminded the class that tonight is the BBQ. Julie did not say the date with the class. She rocked back and forth when the class recited the date. She said "2" at the end of 2002. During free play, she played with her clay. Karen, her assigned buddy, was at another table. I asked Julie what she was making, and she mumbled, "I dunno." When asked to guess how many days of school so far (at calendar time), she guessed 11. This was a good guess. Ten was the right answer. When the class started to read the September poem, Julie turned to smile at me. She is such an intriguing girl. (Field notes, September 16, 2002)

In mid-October, I took a group of children to an empty classroom to read a book with them, as I often did during morning Stations, a time for small group literacy activities in Laura's classroom. Julie and three other children came along with me. While we were spreading the blanket, we chatted a bit.

> I mentioned that Charlene had a birthday on the weekend, and I asked how old she was. She said six, and James said he was six too. He said that Julie was five, and she shook her head. "I'm a different kind of old," she announced with a small smile. I thought to myself that this is kind of how it seemed to me, too. Julie has the air of an older person in some ways. She can be quiet, and then say something

> that will be exactly right for the moment. She is often alone, but doesn't seem unhappy. And yet, today, she skipped to her seat in the classroom at journal time just as any carefree 5-year-old would. She is intriguing to me because of these contrasts. (Field notes, October 21, 2002)

Perhaps my own memories of life on the fringes in elementary school caused me to write about Julie often in my field texts. Perhaps because she was the only First Nations child in the classroom, and I spent most of my teaching years in First Nations communities, I felt a desire to spend time with Julie and to know her better. Perhaps it was those ponytails, a symbol of vulnerability and pride to me, that initially caused me to want to know Julie more.

Lunchtime at School

In the third week of school, Laura told me one morning that Julie, who normally walked home for lunch, left the school yesterday at noon and came back five minutes later, saying no one was home. Laura was away from the school at lunch, and when she returned, she called the home and found that Julie's stepfather was there, asking why Julie had not come home for lunch. Why didn't Julie go home, Laura wondered. Julie was given a hamburger to eat, left over from the school barbeque the night before. This lunchtime mix-up was the first of several and was treated by Julie as cause for wonder but not for further action. It was only later, in looking back across time, that I thought of it as the beginning of the lunchtime tensions between Julie and the school.

Two weeks later, in early October, Julie arrived at the classroom an hour late. Laura was reading a book to the class.

> At 9:35, Julie arrived at the door. It was closed, and I opened it when I heard a knock. She was standing there with a girl of maybe 12 years (a sister or cousin?). The older girl asked if I was a substitute teacher, and when I said no, she wanted to talk to Laura. I said she was reading and it could be awhile before she could come to the door. Could I take a message? No, the girl said she would wait. I asked if maybe she should go to her class. The girl said she did not go to this school. At this moment, Jeanette, the principal, came along and said that the girl could talk to her. She said this so authoritatively that there was no question; the girl turned to talk to her. Julie gave Jeanette a hug while the older girl talked to her briefly. The girl gave Jeanette a little piece of paper, which Jeanette handed to me afterward, to give to Laura, saying that Julie was to stay for lunch today, and that her mom would send the dollar (lunch fee) tomorrow. (Field notes, October 2, 2002)

Again, this was perhaps unusual but not a major concern. Julie was allowed to stay for lunch that day, and she had brought her own food. There was a policy at the school that parents of children who stayed for lunch had to pay a fee for lunchtime supervision, conducted by people who came into the school to work for that hour each day. Normally, the lunch fee was paid in advance, but in this case, Julie was allowed to stay with the understanding that her mother would send the money the next day. The fact that the older girl (whom I later discovered was a sister of Julie's) would deliver the note only to Julie's teacher or the principal showed that Julie's family knew a story of school in which they had to follow certain procedures carefully. If the note went astray, to someone other than Laura or Jeanette, perhaps Julie would not be allowed to stay.

When I began to have lunchtime conversations with four of the children from Laura's classroom, in mid-October, I reminded Julie the day before to bring her lunch on Thursday, the day we met each week. The other children in this group, and in fact, all the other children in the class, always stayed at school for lunch anyway, so this was not a problem for them. Julie was the exception. The lunchtime supervisors questioned me about Julie staying for lunch the first few times we met, and they thought that maybe her mother should pay for her to stay for lunch, even though I was with her the whole time, and she did not require supervision by the lunchtime workers.

On several occasions, Julie told me she was staying for lunch that day, even though it was not a Thursday. She told Laura this as well. Laura checked to see if there was a lunch in her backpack, and if not, Julie was sent home for lunch. Sometimes Laura called home and talked to Julie's stepfather, who said to send her home. Julie seemed to want to stay and experience lunch in the classroom and looked for ways to do this. She seemed to look forward to our Thursday lunchtime conversations, the day when she was allowed to stay for lunch.

> I asked Julie if she had brought her lunch (because today is our lunch group). She smiled and said yes. Laura told me this morning that Julie had come up to her and said, "I have a secret." She said the secret was that she was having lunch with me in Mrs. Smith's room. Laura said Julie was smiling and excited. Julie smiled so

> rarely during the first couple of months of school that this was still something to remark upon. (Field notes, November 7, 2002)

Sometimes Julie forgot her lunch on Thursdays, but she would stay anyway. I brought extra food, and often Bob, one of the other children, would bring a cookie or other treat for each of us. It was not a problem, although Laura wanted me to call Julie's house each time she forgot her lunch. One day in late November, Julie was not at school on a Thursday. Her absence caused me to wonder about another aspect of how I had arranged our lunchtime conversations.

> Why is Julie away? I cannot help but wonder if the need to bring a lunch has kept her away. Maybe there was nothing to bring and so her mom kept her home. I don't know if this would happen, but I am thinking about how I mentioned to Julie (and Fareda) yesterday that today was our lunchtime group, and that we would be bringing our lunches. Julie had said something about telling her mom that they needed to go get some groceries for lunches. I didn't clue in at the time, but maybe that was an issue. I brought cheese and biscuits to share with Julie and the others today, as I did last week. Maybe I should have been more up-front about my willingness to do this. (Field notes, November 28, 2002)

What kind of assumptions was I bringing to the lunchtime book group? As most children stayed for lunch, and their parents paid the lunchtime fees, I had not considered Julie's situation when I asked her to be a part of the lunchtime group. As the only child in the class to go home for lunch regularly, Julie perhaps saw the group as an opportunity to do what she had been trying to do all fall, that is, to experience lunch at school. This may have been a positive aspect, but were there other, more disturbing facets of Julie's participation in the lunchtime group? Her parents had agreed that she could participate, but what kinds of tensions might this have been causing at home, as Julie and her parents had to deal with making a school lunch for Thursdays, perhaps buying different groceries than usual, perhaps at Julie's request, perhaps when it was inconvenient for them? Looking back, I see how my arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987) caused me to act thoughtlessly, in ways that may have interrupted Julie's story to live by. I did not consider how having to bring a lunch might affect Julie and her family. I also did not consider how bending the school rule (you must pay if you stay for lunch) might affect Julie. It made sense that she could stay for lunch on Thursdays for the lunchtime book group, since I would be with her the whole time. There was no need to pay a supervisor to watch her, as she was with me. Perhaps this was confusing for Julie, however, and helped to precipitate the problem that would soon occur.

The lunchtime issues simmered all during the fall, as Julie seemed to want to be there at lunch, but was not allowed to stay except on Thursdays when we met. One morning in early December, Julie told me several times that she was staying for lunch today. It was not a Thursday, we were not going to meet, so I wondered why she was staying. Maybe no one was going to be at home. At lunchtime, this is what happened:

> Julie had been saying to me all morning that she was staying for lunch today. She told Laura this too, just at lunchtime. Laura asked me if I knew anything about this, and I said that Julie had been saying this to me a lot today. Laura called home and talked to Julie's dad, who said that sure, Julie could stay. I got my coat

> on and got ready to go, and Laura said, aren't you staying for lunch today? She thought I was having a lunchtime group today, I realized belatedly. I guess that was why she called to see if Julie could stay. She was annoyed with Julie and called her outside the class and told her to sit in the pit, a circular gathering area outside the Grade 1/2 classrooms. Some of the children came to the door to see what was happening to Julie. I felt terrible that this misunderstanding had occurred. Julie was sitting in the pit with her head down; I think she was crying. Laura was talking to Jeanette, the principal, outside the door, telling her that she doesn't know what to do. I felt like I had done something wrong. Mostly, I felt bad for Julie. (Field notes, December 2, 2002)

Tension #1: Lunchtime Rules Bumping Against Julie's Story to Live By

This event seemed like the culmination of the accumulating tensions surrounding lunchtime. Julie had wanted to stay for lunch and was not allowed. The story that she was trying to live by was bumping up against the school story that existed at Ravine Elementary School. Children were not allowed to stay for lunch unless their parents paid in advance and they brought a lunch. These rules did not seem unreasonable. I wondered, however, just how severe a misdeed it was to try to work around the rules. Was it wrong to try to stay for lunch one day because you want to be a part of what you imagine might be an exciting and fun part of the school day, one that you do not get to experience? Julie, at five years old, was made to feel bad over this. How had I contributed to this, perhaps by confusing Julie over

the lunchtime book group meeting days? How well does a 5-year-old remember which day is Thursday?

The next day, Julie was not at school. How might this event have shaped Julie's story to live by? Might she see herself as on the borders of school life, outside the circle of those who stayed (seemingly effortlessly) for lunch daily, while she worked hard to try to stay for just one day?

The interwoven tensions in this story are connected with both Julie and me. The happenings that day caused Julie unhappiness and perhaps created a place of tension for her around lunchtimes and around her place in the classroom. Would she be afraid to take another risk after this reprimand? Julie was already on the edges of classroom life, with no real friends or playmates in the class. Now that the children had seen her unhappy in the pit during this situation, would it be even more difficult for her to move in from the margins?

At the same time I consider how Julie's story to live by might have been shifted by this event, I also consider how I was changed as result of what happened. As another adult in the classroom, why did I not play a bigger role in stopping this situation? I felt that I was in slow motion, that I did not realize what was happening until it was already over. Even then, though, why did I not take a more active role, telling Laura and Jeanette what I thought, that this was just a misunderstanding, that Julie had not done such a terrible thing? Why didn't I speak up? Why didn't I take Julie out of the pit and to the bathroom or somewhere else away from the gaze of the teachers and students? The tension for me here is between what I did and

what I feel I should have done. As I sit typing this paragraph, my mind wanders back to my own childhood and my feeling of powerlessness when a teacher in my early years called children to the front of the room for math or other work incorrectly done, strapping them in full view of us all. Certainly what happened to Julie was not as extreme as that, but, for me, that feeling of helplessness was similar. Watching, transfixed in horror, as Julie was humiliated in front of her peers, I did nothing. In fact, I mouthed what I thought were a few words of comfort to Julie and left the school as quickly as I could. I wanted out of there. I did not want to be part of what was happening to Julie, but I did not stay to try to change it. As a researcher in the school, with over 10 years of teaching experience, I was not in a powerless position. I could have talked with Laura and Jeanette. I could possibly have changed the outcome of the situation for Julie. Why didn't I? Do the school stories that position Julie so firmly on the margins also work to position me in certain ways? Why could I not shift the story I seem to live by, the story of myself as a good girl, one who does not cause trouble, a story I was given by school many years ago?

Red Parka Mary: A Special Book

Having been a teacher in small northern First Nations communities, I wondered if Julie's family had strong connections with the reserve community where her mother grew up, and with extended family there. One week in mid-November, Julie missed a Tuesday and then a Thursday morning. When she arrived Thursday after lunch, I spoke with her.

> I saw that Julie was here this afternoon, quietly sitting at her desk waiting for the afternoon to get started. I asked her how she was, and she said sad. She said her auntie had been sick. "She got sicker and sicker and now she is gone." (She didn't say she died). Julie told me she had gone to church to pray for her auntie today. I told her I was sorry and that I had missed her today. She didn't say anything further but sat with her head on her hands. (Field notes, November 21, 2002)

Julie sometimes mentioned her mother when we were reading stories together. One of the first books I read with the class was *Raven, a Trickster Tale from the Pacific Northwest* (McDermott, 2001). When Julie saw the book I had chosen, she told me she knew this book, and that her mother had this book. When I took a group of five children to the library to read *Abel's Moon* (Hughes, 1999), Julie said her mother helped make that book (although this was not a book by an Aboriginal author). When I read *Caribou Song* (Highway, 2001) to Julie and a small group of children, she said proudly that her mother could read the Cree text (which sits beside the English text on each page). Julie seemed to connect her mother with many of the books I read, especially those by First Nations authors and illustrators. Her linking of these books with stories of her mother seems to me to indicate how central her mother is in Julie's story to live by.

In mid-November, I decided to read *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996) with the lunchtime reading group. I was thinking especially of Julie as I carried the book to school, wondering what resonances this story about an older Cree woman in a small First Nations community in western Canada might have for this little girl. I was disappointed when Julie was away from school that day, which turned out to be the day of her auntie's funeral. The following week, during the morning reading club time, I asked Julie if I could read *Red Parka Mary* with her.

> She nodded, and I went to get it. When I came back, Fareda was there too, and she stayed at my right elbow as I began to read. Julie was quiet as I read. I thought perhaps she was not enjoying the book. Then, as I was at the part where the boy buys the parka for Mary, she wanted to flip back a few pages to the page where Mary and the boy are sitting in her kitchen, making his moccasins. She said, "That reminds me of my Gookum's kitchen. Her house is like that." Gookum is the Cree word for grandmother. Julie had also pointed out the word Mom, a few pages earlier. (Field notes, November 20, 2002)

Later that day, Julie and I began to write a story together. I acted as the scribe while she began to tell me the story she wanted to create. We went with paper and pencil to Laura's office to work, where it was quiet and we would not be interrupted. Julie began to tell me about visiting her Gookum's house recently, and about her auntie dying.

> Julie: She died because she was very old.
>
> Anne: Oh?
>
> Julie: Yeah, real old.
>
> Anne: OK, and then…
>
> Julie: Um, she said goodbye. She gave me her special ring. (Transcripts, November 20, 2002, p. 6)

This was the first time Julie had mentioned her Gookum and her auntie. I thought about how we had read *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996) today. Had reading this book created a space for Julie to bring a little bit of her story of her life into school, or at least into our shared space in the school? Was it important for Julie to see a kitchen that reminded her of her Gookum's in the pages of a book at school?

We did not finish that scribed story that day. When we returned to it a few days later (the next day that I was in the class), Julie teased me a little about my pronunciation of the Cree word for grandmother, Gookum, telling me I was saying it wrong. I tried then to imitate her way of saying this word, but she smiled and shook her head. I did not seem to be getting it right. Julie changed the direction of her scribed story somewhat that day, adding the three other children from our lunchtime group to the tale. Bob, James, and Fareda came to visit her at her grandmother's house in this new section of the story, and they were her best friends.

> She wanted to include the three other lunchtime group children in her story. This makes me wonder if she is seeing herself in this class differently because of the lunchtime group. She referred to Bob, James, and Fareda as her best friends. Usually, Julie does not really appear to be very close friends with anyone in the class, although I think she seems less an outsider than she used to. But if she imagines herself differently, maybe that is something to start with. Julie entitled this story, *All the Friends that I Made.* (Field notes, November 25, 2002)

Julie's title surprised me. Did she really see the three other children from the lunchtime group as her best friends? Or did she want that to be the case? Either way, this made me consider how Julie, and the other children, experienced the lunchtime group. How much of her experience was I able to know?

New Shoes

> When I walked down the hallway to the Grade 1/2 classrooms of Ravine Elementary School on the morning of May 1st, 2003, after being away from the school for over four months, the first child I saw was Julie. She was coming back from the bathroom and when she saw me, just as she was about to open the door of the classroom, she turned and gave me a big smile. As I knelt down to meet her outstretched arms, I thought about how she had grown since Christmastime. She was wearing a velvety black dress that I remembered from the fall and shiny black shoes. "I missed you," she said. "I missed you too," I responded. We held each other's hands. "Your hair is longer now," I said. She nodded and replied, "And yours is a different colour." I had had highlights put in my hair a couple of weeks earlier. We both laughed. Then we opened the door of Room 7 and entered, to be swept up in the busy-ness of classroom activity that awaited us. (Field notes, May 1, 2003)

With this first returning to Ravine Elementary after my move away at the end of December to another province and new job as a teacher educator, I found Julie was very happy to see me, and I was surprised at the depth of emotion I felt at seeing her. I was not fully aware before that moment of the impact we were having on each other as our relationship continued to grow. In the several weeks I spent at Ravine School in May and June 2003, Julie and I talked and spent time together, and *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996) again held an important place in our conversations.

> At recess that morning, I was standing by the boot racks as Julie put on her shoes to go outside, the same shiny black ones that I had noticed earlier. She told me that her mother had bought these shoes for her in Calgary recently, as well as some other new clothing. Laura informed me that Julie told her she had dressed up because I was coming back today. We walked around together at recess outdoors, and Julie was very attentive, holding my hand and pointing out the other children in the class as we strolled along. Laura also told me that Julie's family's phone had been disconnected recently, which made it difficult for the school to be in communication with them, and that Julie had not gone to Kinsmen School a couple of weeks ago, so had missed a week of school.
>
> When Rita and several other children invited us to play hopscotch with them, Julie and I walked over to the pavement. As I began to play, Julie backed away and said she didn't want to play. She soon quietly drifted away. When recess was over, she walked slowly back into the school. (Field notes, May 1, 2003)

In this field note, I found Julie on the edges of the classroom and school community, although she and I had no trouble connecting warmly with each other. The things Laura mentioned in this field note troubled me somewhat, as both the disconnected phone and the absence from Kinsmen School implied Julie was further on the margins of the school story than in the previous fall. Without a phone, Julie's family was harder to reach, and Laura had developed a pattern of calling fairly often to check in with them on Julie's progress. Kinsmen School was a week-long set of physical activities each class in the school participated in. During that week, the classes were bussed daily to a community centre with a gym and equipment, and the students engaged in a variety of what sounded like challenging and educative activities. Each family was required to pay a certain amount of money to help fund this week. Julie did not bring in the money, so she stayed home for the week. Had Julie's parents contacted the school, they would have been told she could come to Kinsmen School anyway. Jeanette told me this a few days later. Julie's parents did not contact the school, however, and I was reminded of how Julie's older sister brought in the note requesting that Julie be allowed to stay for lunch back on October 2, 2002. Back then, I had the sense that Julie's family might have a story of the school as a place where you had to carefully follow certain procedures. By not sending the money, perhaps they thought that procedures had not been followed and that Julie could not attend Kinsmen School. I wondered about the tension between the school stories teachers live and tell and the stories families tell of school.

The following day, Julie came with me to the library to read a book. She chose *Granny's Quilt* (West, 1999), from a selection of books I brought. It was about a grandmother explaining to her granddaughter how she had made her quilt from pieces of fabric left from dresses she had worn throughout her life. She told a little story about memories from each fabric piece. It ended with the grandmother giving the little girl a piece of fabric from a dress she had made for her, so that she could start her own quilt. Julie listened attentively, and touched and looked carefully at each scrap of fabric on each page. She figured out who the grandmother was on each page, even on the early pages when it was difficult to tell who was who among the granny's siblings. (Field notes, May 1, 2002)

The keen attention Julie paid to the book, touching the pages and attending to the words and pictures closely, reminded me of her strong interest in learning to read and write. From the first day of school, when she said, "I can't write my ABCs." and then went off to a table by the door and quietly wrote the upper case letters clearly and competently (Field notes, September 3, 2002), I noticed the ways that Julie was making progress in the area of literacy. She could read some words and had good strategies for figuring out unknown words. Importantly, she really enjoyed children's literature and liked to write on her own. She often wrote short letters to me in the pages of my blue researcher's notebook, accompanied by drawings of the two of us.

However, the school story of Julie was a bit different. She was storied as someone who was not doing well in school. When the school board-mandated language testing for Grade 1 and two took place in May 2002, Laura asked me to take several children to the library to do the tests orally with them. She said they would not be able to do them on their own in the classroom (Field notes, May 1, 2002). Julie was one of these children. I was happy to do the work with these children in this less stressful environment, but I wondered why Julie was put in this group. Perhaps she had not done well in some earlier testing, although her daily work seemed satisfactory. The placement of Julie in this group seemed an expression of the school story of Julie, that is, as a child who was performing below expectations. Did no one else see the ways that Julie was growing and developing as a literate person? I began to wonder if I was inaccurate in my estimation of Julie's emergent literacy. In the following field note, Julie connects the books we read with questions from her own shifting story to live by, a sophisticated literary response.

> After we read the book *Granny's Quilt* (West, 1999), Julie turned to face me and said that poor people have to sew their own blankets. The day before, she had mentioned poor people too and said that I had read a story about poor people that she remembered. I asked Julie if *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996), which I had brought with me, was the book she had been thinking about when she mentioned us reading a book about poor people. She hesitated and then nodded, yes, this was the book she had remembered. I wondered what that hesitation might have meant. As we read the book again, at a leisurely pace, we stopped to talk often. Julie described Mary, the main character of the book, as being poor because she didn't have enough money for a warm winter coat. She also talked about giving money to a poor person when she was on a field trip with the school. As well, she and her mother had given change to someone on the street downtown last winter. She seemed to be interested in exploring her experiences around poor people, and in thinking about who she was in relation to poor people.
>
> In *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996), Mary traps rabbits, foxes, and beaver. Julie told me that poor people have to trap their own meat. Looking sideways at me, she said her mother told her family they were going to have rabbit stew once, but that she was only joking. Rabbit stew would be something poor people ate, she told me. I said that I have had rabbit stew and that I liked it, and she looked at me appraisingly. What was she thinking? Did she wonder if I

> was poor? Did she wonder if I was making this story up? (Field notes, May 1, 2002)

Julie talked about "poor people" several times over that week in May. The first few mentions were related to her understanding of what it might mean to be poor, to have to make blankets for oneself, or not to have any money for a warm winter coat. Then Julie's wonders gradually became a little more personal. She, with her mother, had given money to someone on the street last year. Her mother had talked about having rabbit stew. Perhaps Julie was circling around this concept of being poor in relation to her own story to live by. Was Julie trying to understand how she might be positioned by others, in socioeconomic terms? Was she trying to position herself on a socioeconomic landscape of which she was just beginning to become aware? When Julie looked me over after I said I had eaten rabbit stew, was she shifting her inquiry momentarily to wonder where *I* might fit on the socioeconomic landscape? What assumptions had Julie made of me up until that point? What assumptions was I making, as I tried to understand Julie's sustained interest in what it means to be poor? The focus on poverty continued into the next week, at least for me.

> A few days later, I asked Julie if she would like to go for a walk and maybe take some pictures. She went to the boot rack to put on her outdoor shoes and her jacket. I noticed she was having a hard time putting on the shoes, and she said they were new; her mother had given them to her (they were the black shiny ones she had had on the first day I was in the classroom this spring). The shoes looked too small for her feet. Julie said she had turned her ankle, and that is why it was

> hard to put on the shoes. Once she got them on, she said she was fine. So out we went for a walk, which was a very slow walk because of the tight shoes. I remembered how she had not wanted to play hopscotch the other day. Looking back, this was probably because it would have hurt her feet in these shoes.
>
> We headed to the other side of the school and she saw the trees her class had planted last spring, and wanted a picture of the one she had planted (a fir—it was way too big for her to have planted last year in Kindergarten). I took a photo of her beside the tree (She took all the other photos). As we headed back to the school doors, Julie said, "I missed you while you were in Nova Scotia." I thought about how Laura said her attendance has been so good this week and last.
>
> Julie and I returned to the classroom and I felt great relief when she took off those too-tight shoes. When I shook a few grains of sand out of my shoes at the school entrance, she asked me if I had forgotten something. I asked what and she told me that we are supposed to shake out the sand outside (not inside as I had just done). We smiled at my mistake. (Field notes, May 15, 2003)

Julie's new shoes, her too-small shoes, were special because her mother had brought them for her from Calgary. She walked slowly and probably in discomfort because she wanted to wear them. When I talked with Jeanette, the principal of Ravine Elementary School, she asked me if I had noticed Julie's shoes. She had, and was concerned about them. She was trying to find a bigger pair that Julie could use. Julie began to wear her indoor shoes, light blue sandals, outside at recess. I mentioned this to Jeanette, and she said that maybe Julie was figuring out her own way to work through this issue. Julie seems to me to figure out her own way quite beautifully as she walks through the stories that meet her here on the school landscape every day.

Tension #2: Awakening to Positionings On and Off the School Landscape

Julie was not one who accepted placidly a story given to her by others, as her perseverance in the lunchtime stories showed. She continued to try to find ways to stay for lunch despite being discouraged from doing so by the school. When she began to question the notion of being poor with me, perhaps she was troubling a positioning she felt was being given to her by the school story of her.

Julie showed by her words on May 1, 2003, her knowledge of how she was positioned both on and off the school landscape. It seemed she was grappling with an idea (where did it come from?) that she might be considered "poor" by some. During my first day at the school in May, Laura told me that the phone in Julie's family home had been disconnected. Laura said she was frustrated not to be able to reach Julie's parents, whom she had called regularly up to this point. Were the disconnected phone and Laura's frustration an impetus for Julie's wonders about poverty?

The too-small shoes seem to me a symbol of Julie's resistance to the school story of her, to the way she might be positioned by the school story. The shiny black shoes had been bought by her mother, especially for her, which invested them with importance to Julie. This importance was greater than her physical need for comfortable feet, at least for a time, and she willingly wore them around the

playground. She did not admit that her feet hurt, or ask for help from anyone at school. Instead, she wore the shoes with pride. Jeanette would have helped her, by finding her a second-hand pair, had Julie asked. Julie did not ask.

Julie told me that only poor people eat rabbit stew. When I lived in northern Canada, I ate rabbit stew because meat shipped in by plane from the south was prohibitively expensive. But I also ate it because it was what we ate in that time and place, alongside other delicious food like caribou meat and blueberries and bannock. What had happened in Julie's life to make her think that rabbit stew was only eaten as a last resort? Had Julie been shamed for eating rabbit stew, I wondered. When I told Julie I had eaten and enjoyed rabbit stew, she gazed at me and I had time to consider what she might be thinking of me. What story was she telling of this person who kept returning to her life at school to talk with her, read with her, and write about her?

The Wise Woman and Her Secret

Although Julie seemed aware of the school story of her, at least in some ways, she did not stop creating her own story to live by. In mid-June 2003, I returned to Ravine School. During this June visit, I read Julie a piece I wrote in the winter based on transcripts and field notes about what I called lunchtime tensions. In the fall, she had wanted to stay for lunch at school and worked to find ways around the fact that she could not. She was the only one in the class who went home for lunch every day. Laura told me this was because she lived nearby and had a parent at home over the lunch hour. When I asked Julie to be a part of the lunchtime book conversations, one aspect that she enjoyed was that it provided a reason to stay at school for lunch, to experience the lunchtime life of the school. I was slightly nervous about reading this with her, because it brought us face to face with the story Julie was trying to create for herself as a student (one who stays for lunch, at least now and then) bumping up against the school story that children who go home for lunch must leave the premises and not return until the end of lunchtime.

Julie listened intently as I read this piece to her, with her head tilted slightly to the side. She then told me that she liked going home for lunch now (Field notes, June 12, 2003, p. 6). She said she liked it because her mother had lots of good things to eat. I wondered whether Julie was trying to distance herself from that girl in my writing, the girl who struggled to stay at school for lunch. In the next moment, Julie looked sideways at me, and said, "But I didn't have breakfast today" (p. 6). She then turned and began to pick up and look through the books I had brought today, deciding which one she wanted to read. It seemed a clear signal that we were not going any farther with that conversation. A little later, the following incident caused me to think again about Julie's words that morning.

> I left the school at lunch and was waiting at the bus stop to catch a bus to the university. As I waited, I watched children going home for lunch from Ravine Elementary. Julie came out of the school, crossed the street and walked toward her house for a minute or two, then slowly turned and walked back toward the school. Julie had not given up trying to stay at school for lunch, apparently. She walked back and forth along the sidewalk across the road from the school,

> perhaps waiting for me to get on the bus before returning to the school grounds. We waved at each other, but she did not come over to see me. (Field notes, June 12, 2003)

At almost the end of the school year, Julie still seemed to be looking for ways to stay at school for lunch, despite what she said to me that morning. She had not shifted toward the story Laura and the school had for her of a girl who should go home for lunch, it appeared. A book conversation between Julie and me on June 12, 2003, provided another way to think about Julie's strong desire to maintain her own story to live by.

> Julie chose a book from the selection I had brought that day in June entitled *The Wise Woman and Her Secret* (Bunting, 1991). As we opened this book and began to read, a big grin spread over Julie's face. I had forgotten that the little girl, a main character in the story, was named Julia. Both of us were excited about this name, so similar to Julie's. In the book, Julia meets a wise woman. Everyone else is trying to force the old woman to reveal to them her secret (the secret of her happiness). They are frustrated and even angry that she will not tell the secret but instead asks them to look in the barn, in the well, in various places to find it. Julia goes along with the crowd to each of the places the wise woman suggests, but rather than frantically searching for the secret in each place, she enjoys the beauty of what she finds in each place. Finally, the people give up and leave the wise woman in disgust, but Julia remains behind and talks with her. The wise woman tells Julia how she is curious about the world around her and has many questions and wonders. Continuing to ask and wonder is how the wise woman has found

> fulfillment. This is her secret. Julia begins to see that it is a good thing to "wonder and wander," although many around her had ridiculed her for this in the past. At the end of the book, Julia says "I have lots of questions." Julie, sitting beside me, was quite absorbed as we read this story, and she smiled at me and said, "I have lots of questions too," as I read this page. (June 12, 2003)

The book, *The Wise Woman and her Secret* (Bunting, 1991), allowed Julie to tell a story of herself as wise, providing mirrors and windows for her (Galda, 1998) to begin to imagine herself in new ways. Her words ("I have lots of questions too") made me think about what it means to be wise. I have had conversations with Julie where she is working to make sense of what it means to be poor and times when we have talked about her grandmother's kitchen and its similarity to the kitchen in *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996), drawing connections between her own Cree culture and the Cree characters in the book. She has made her mother an integral part of her talk, and has helped me think about the centrality of mothers in our stories of ourselves. Julie's stories, with her "lots of questions," resonate for me with what it means to be "wise" and help Julie name herself "wise." I made bookmarks for each of the children at the end of the school year in June, with some words on them that seemed to me to be a part of each child's story to live by. On Julie's bookmark, I put the word "wise." I wonder what she thought about this.

Julie and Family Stories

On June 10, 2003, Julie told me about her cat, Angel. The cat was going to have babies soon, so Julie was looking forward to this event. We were reading a book called

The Rough-Face Girl (Martin, 2002), an Aboriginal story that, for me, is reminiscent of the Cinderella story. The book tells of two older sisters who treated the younger girl unkindly. Her face was rough because she had to do all the cooking and she had been burnt, and so she was called the rough-face girl. The two older sisters were hoping to impress and marry a "very great rich and supposedly handsome invisible being" (unpaged). They dressed up in fancy clothing and left their home, walking through the village.

At this point in the story, Julie commented, "That's what happens when you're 18, you get kicked out of the house" (Transcripts, June 10, 2003, p. 5). "Do you?" I asked. "Yes, and you have your own baby," she continued. "My mom gots 10 kids." Julie then described her family and told me the names of all her siblings. She said that one of her aunties was 17 years old and has had her own baby. "Pretty soon she's going to get kicked out of the house" (p. 7). These words seemed harsh to me, as did the idea of being kicked out of the house. Yet Julie did not appear concerned as she told me. At first, when Julie said this, I felt worried about what seemed like the harsh realities with which she lives. I did not linger in this part of the conversation with her; I was unsure how to relate to her about this.

As I thought about it while writing my field notes that night, I began to consider how words taken out of context can change their meaning dramatically. In the context of a large and caring family, is talking about being kicked out at a certain point a cruel and hurtful thing, or is it more a part of how that family works, how they adapt the space to the growing numbers? My thoughts wander back to my first year of university, when I had to pack up everything from my bedroom at home and either take it with me or store it in the attic, because I had four younger sisters and that bedroom was needed for one of them. Some might say I was kicked out of the house at 18, though in our family we storied it differently, saying I was starting a new adventure, beginning an exciting time as a university student in another community. I felt fully supported by my family as I did this. Perhaps Julie's auntie feels excited about her entrance into adulthood, and being kicked out of the house is not such an unthinkable thing. Julie's words help me think about how easy it is to create a distance from those whose words don't seem to fit with our stories and to take their words out of context and freeze them there, creating an even bigger gap between them and us.

Tension #3: Cultural Stories as Humus

The book The Rough-Face Girl (Martin, 2002) helped to create an opening, a space for Julie to tell this family story of her auntie's transition to adulthood. She had, however, begun to talk about home life before we opened the book, telling me stories about her cat, Angel, who was about to have kittens. The conversational space we had created together was important in encouraging the telling and retelling of these stories. Julie's story of her auntie being kicked out of the house, her story of her Gookum's funeral, her stories of her mother writing children's books, and other family stories she shared with me over the many moments we had together seemed to nurture Julie's shifting understanding of who she was and who she was becoming. My initial perceptions of these stories were sometimes shallow, as

I tried to see them from within my own cultural stories. The story of Julie's auntie is an example of this. A tension exists for me between the ways I am bound by my own story to live by, bound in ways that make it difficult to see from Julie's perspective, and the hope that I find in moments when I am able to deepen my understanding of Julie's story to live by, bit by bit. I wonder how many times I may have missed the significance of Julie's words because I was not able to shift my own perspective to see what Julie saw.

As I reconsider my conversations with Julie, I am more fully aware of the messiness of the process of trying to be awake to moments such as this one with Julie, sometimes catching a glimmer of understanding, sometimes not. Florio-Ruane (2001) provides a metaphor of culture as "the nurturing of growth. As such, like the growth of plants, human development in the context of culture happens in the messy and indeterminate "humus" of our encounters and conversations over time, place, role, institution, history and relationship" (p. 144). I am drawn to this idea of actively making culture and at the same time being constructed by one's culture, in the midst of our lives, our relationships and our stories. Perhaps telling me her family stories helped Julie to shape her story to live by. Perhaps the telling of her family stories is a way for Julie to understand how she is shaped by and shapes her own culture. Listening to these stories helped to shape my story to live by as I came alongside Julie and thought further about my own understanding of the narratives Julie shared with me. Reading through the writing I did about Julie from earlier

conversations may have provided further humus for the identity-making work both Julie and I were engaged in as we told and retold our stories.

A Letter to Julie

In November 2003, as I prepared to fly to western Canada and visit Ravine Elementary School, I found myself filled with wonders about each of the four children I had come to know in the lunchtime book conversations. I began to write letters to each of them, drawing on some of the moments I shared with them as I read and reread the field notes and transcripts of our conversations from the previous school year. I read this letter to Julie during my time at Ravine School in November 2003.

October 24, 2003

Dear Julie,

When I read to you from my writing around our time spent together last fall, you smiled and gently but firmly set me straight. It was not your auntie whose funeral you attended in November 2002; it was your Gookum's. Were you sure? Yes, you were. You used to have four Gookums and now you have three. And by the way, I was still not saying Gookum correctly, you reminded me with a grin. Finally I caught the initial "g" sound, unlike the "k" for "Kookum" that I am used to from my days in northern Saskatchewan. I have not thought about the differences in Cree dialect across the western provinces for a long time. You help me remember.

I read the part where you told me your mother helped to make some of the books I've read to you and the others. You were older, six years old now, and I think you sensed that this story you told me needs more detail to make it plausible. You admitted that your mother drew only one picture for one of the books, and then she had to stop because of bad headaches. "She went to the doctor. She didn't finish the whole book so they called the next person to... [finish it]. But she said it was fun" (May 7, 2003, p. 4). Julie, you are so serious and convincing as you tell me this. You remind me of the larger-than-life role that mothers can play in our lives. I remember telling people that my mother, a music teacher, was the best pianist in Nova Scotia. You help me think about mothers and how they shape our stories to live by.

This spring you had been wondering about what it means to be poor. In books we read, you pointed out people who might be poor and talked about how you can tell that they are. In a book Granny's Quilt *(West, 1999), you pointed to the beautiful quilts the main character created, and you told me that she must be poor because "poor people have to sew their own blankets" (Field notes, May 5, 2003). You asked me about a book I read to you late fall about poor people, and at first I cannot think what book this might be. Laura's words float back to me as we talk. She had said that your phone has been disconnected recently, and it is difficult to get in touch with your mother. I wonder if in some way your interest in what it means to be poor was connected to your imagining of your own story to live by.*

After thinking it over, I wondered if Red Parka Mary *(Evyindson, 1996) might be the book you were remembering from the fall of 2002. I brought it to read with you again.*

As we read, you examined each illustration closely. You lingered over the picture of Mary's kitchen, with its small wood stove in the centre, a couple of fox and rabbit hides hung on the wall for future use, and a pair of snowshoes by the door. You touched the illustration with your fingers, asking about the gloves Mary is making and trimming with rabbit fur and beadwork. Did I think this was a dream catcher? No, I thought it might be a beaver hide being stretched to dry. I told you that Mary is a trapper, and you ask, "What's a trap?" When I explained, you told me that once your mother made rabbit stew. I asked if it was good, and you quickly shifted to another plane, telling me that was just a joke. I decided to tell you that I have eaten rabbit stew, and liked it. It is true; I have. You looked at me thoughtfully, through narrowed eyes, and I wondered if you thought I was making this up, or I had strayed over some kind of border from where you imagine I belong. Then you asked me if it tasted good, and the conversation moved on to other things. Julie, you help me remember eating rabbit stew so long ago, and liking it.

After we finished reading Red Parka Mary *(Eyvindson, 1996), you returned to the topic of poor people. You told me that people were poor in the olden days, and I wondered what stories are living in your head about olden days. You recalled a trip downtown when you had a dollar and you were going to buy candy, but then you gave it to "someone who was poor" (Transcripts, May 7, 2003, p. 18). With your hands outstretched, you formed a cup. "Their hands were like this…I give them all the money because…" (Transcripts, May 7, 2003, p. 18). It seemed to me that you were being quite careful to keep your ideas about poor people quite separate from yourself. I wondered why you were drawing this border…maybe we will talk again about this when I return.*

Thank you, Julie, for spending time with me. I learn so much from our conversations.

Love, Anne

As I read this letter to Julie, she drew a picture in my notebook, the one I use to jot field notes while I am at school. Her picture was of the two of us together in the pit in the library, reading *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996), she told me. On the top of the page she wrote, "To Mrs. Orr, I like you." Julie told me she had written a story about me (as I had written one about her), but her little brother had ripped it up. Julie pointed to a story web on the wall and said that she had made a web like that for her story of me. Julie and I seemed to be able to step back into relation with each other after another four-month separation. I found this renewed intimacy quite amazing, and wondered how it came to be. The writing I brought to share with Julie was perhaps part of it. The letter almost immediately put us right back into the conversations we had been having in the spring of 2003.

Interestingly, on November 25, 2003, when I read this letter to Julie, she did not choose to talk about some of the issues I raised in the letter. She instead talked about her little brother, Jerry, who was in Kindergarten this year at her school. Until this year, Julie had been the only child from her family attending this school. Jeanette, the principal, mentioned to me that Julie was very responsible in watching out for Jerry at school. As Julie and I sat in the library, we saw Jerry walking to another class with a teacher aide. He saw Julie and waved and called out loudly, "Hi, Bajie!" Julie smiled and told me that

Bajie was her nickname at home. I wondered if this was a Cree word, and what it might mean. Julie seemed happy to have a family member nearby in school.

Julie made a point of telling me that she could read, and read part of *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996) to me, as I had brought that book along with me again, in anticipation of talking with her. She then found a book about boats on the library shelf and read it carefully to me. The writing, drawing, and reading that Julie did on this day made me wonder if her story to live by was shifting these days to include a story of herself as a good student. I am not sure Julie had this story of herself in Grade 1, when she seemed to live on the margins of the class. Julie had a new teacher this year, as Laura, her Grade 1 teacher, had moved up to teach a Grade Five/Six class. Was Julie beginning to re-imagine herself as someone positioned less marginally in school?

Writing a Piece of Fiction for Julie

Red Parka Mary (Eyvindson, 1996) was a favourite book that Julie and I read together frequently. In this book, a young boy overcomes his fears ("Someone, somehow, sometime, had told me that because of her brown eyes, I should be frightened" p. 7) and befriends Mary, a lonely and poor older woman in a small Cree community. They sit in Mary's sparsely furnished but homey kitchen after school each day, as Mary makes moccasins and quietly talks with him. Julie was drawn to the illustration of the two in the kitchen and ran her fingers over this picture many times, saying that Mary's kitchen reminded her of her Gookum's house. Julie told me how much she liked to spend time at her Gookum's.

I have written this fictional piece with Julie as its central character, based on the field texts I collected during the lunchtime book group gatherings and other conversations with Julie and observations of her as we came to know each other over course of her years in Grades One and Two. The kitchen illustration in *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996) is the scene around which I created this short story, as I imagined Julie visiting her grandmother, her Gookum, in a similar kitchen. I wanted this fiction to illustrate the ways that I saw Julie, a 6-year-old, working toward a narrative coherence in her stories to live by, with the idea of cultural stories and cultural imagination (Florio-Ruane, 2001) playing a key role in this.

Visiting Gookum's House

"Hurry!" Julie called to her mother as their car turned on to the narrow road leading to her grandmother's house. Julie and her mother and little brothers were visiting her Gookum today, and she was very excited. It had been a long time since they had been to Gookum's house.

Soon the car stopped and Julie was the first one out. She ran inside and warmed her hands by the wood stove in the kitchen. There was her Gookum, sitting near the stove, sewing something. Gookum looked up and smiled at her, and Julie, suddenly shy, smiled back. "Where is Mom?" asked her grandmother in her warm low voice. "Out in the car, getting some things" said Julie. "She'll be right here."

Julie looked around the cozy kitchen. It smelled absolutely wonderful in here! This was one of her favourite places. Buddy, the dog, was curled up on the floor in one *corner, the table was covered with a coffee pot, a tray of her Gookum's delicious biscuits, jam, butter, and what looked like some candies, hopefully for Julie and Jerry, her younger brother.*

Julie's mother came in just then with baby Bill and Jerry, and Grandma got up to say hello. She poured a cup of steaming hot coffee for each grown up, and soon they were sitting at the table, talking away. Bill sat under the table and chewed on a biscuit thoughtfully. Jerry sat up at the table with his mother, eyeing the candies. This was the moment Julie had been waiting for. She tiptoed quietly over to the door and went outside.

No voices called her back, and there was still some daylight in the sky, so Julie headed down the road, past the other houses, to the little store near the lake. Julie saw three girls, about her age, playing hopscotch in front of one house. She kept walking. Julie did not like hopscotch.

When she reached the store, Julie could see a couple of people sitting out front on the bench, talking. She remembered the people she and her mother had seen sitting in front of stores downtown, that day they has gone on the subway. She had held her mother's hand tight as they walked by the man sitting quietly with his hat upturned to receive any spare change that passers-by dropped in. When she asked, her mother said that the man was poor; he had no money. On their way out of the building, Julie dropped the dollar she had been saving for gum into the man's hat. What did it mean to be poor, she wondered.

But the people sitting in front of the Lucky Dollar store down the road from her grandmother's house were laughing and talking. They did not have a hat out. Julie was *quite sure that poor people lived on the street in the city. There were no poor people here. Julie turned and headed back to her Gookum's house.*

When she went into the house, her grandma was busy making a stew. She told Julie that it was rabbit stew. Julie thought she was joking about this, but it certainly smelled good. Her mother and Jerry had gone to see a friend down the road, and Bill was sleeping, so Julie perched on a chair and watched her grandmother at work. "How is school?" asked Gookum.

"Good," said Julie quietly. She liked school most of the time, except when she had to sit still for a long time. She especially liked making things from clay and painting. She was a good artist, she thought. Her mother had just come to the school for Open House and had seen Julie's good pictures and her name on her desk and everything. Julie liked it when she found someone to play with at recess. At first, she hadn't known many people in her Grade 1/2 class, and she had walked around alone at recess. But now she had made some friends, and they played tag and ran around. Someday maybe she would bring a friend out to her Gookum's house. That would be fun.

Julie jumped up from the chair and went to the window. Outside, it was getting dark. Julie could see her mother and Jerry heading up the road toward the house, Jerry running ahead and then back to his mother again. "Mom's coming," she announced quietly. "Good," said Gookum. "The stew is ready."

After supper, Julie curled up on the couch to watch TV. She was getting a little sleepy. As she looked around the small, cozy home, she saw her shoes, alongside her mother's and her brothers' shoes, by the door on the mat. Julie loved the shiny black *shoes her mother had brought her from Calgary recently. They were a little bit hard to walk in, maybe a little tight, but they were a gift from her mother, especially for her, so she wore them every day. As Julie drifted off to sleep, she glimpsed a show on the television about Halloween. She remembered the shiny pink Barbie costume she had worn last Halloween, and how proud she had been of it, in spite of how it had itched her.*

Lying there on the couch at her Gookum's house, Julie felt so warm, with the heat from the wood stove filling the room. More than that, though, Julie felt warm on the inside. She was here with her family, and even though her real home was in the city, she felt like she was at home here. She hoped they would stay for a long time.

Julie's Stories to Live By

In my last meeting with Julie, I opened the book *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996) to the page with Mary's kitchen illustrated and told Julie the name of the story I had written for her, *Visiting Gookum's House*. Julie smiled and said that sometimes she calls her Gookum *Baba*, the Ukrainian name for Grandma, and she also calls her Grandmother. She seemed to be thinking of all the names for grandmother she knew. Perhaps this was one way in which Julie was playing with cultural stories. I read this piece of fiction to her, and part way through, Julie stopped me to say that she had three little brothers, not two, as I had written. So, we added another brother to the story as we read along. When we came to the part about the shoes from Calgary, Julie told me she and her family were moving to Calgary. Jeanette, the principal, had mentioned this possibility to me as well. At the end of our reading of the story, Julie said she does like to visit her grandmother's house, and sometimes she goes all by herself and stays overnight. She did not refer to her grandmother as Gookum at all during this conversation, in contrast to her Grade 1 year, when she always did. We drew a picture together, in my notebook, of her grandmother's kitchen. Julie laughed at the legs I drew on the stove and changed them (Field notes, April 23, 2004).

Over the nearly two years that I have come to know Julie, she has impressed me with the strength of her ability to maintain her own story to live by, through challenges like the lunchtime tensions and times when she seemed on the margins of classroom life. Attending to the stories Julie told of herself and her family provided me with both windows into the identity work she is engaged in and mirrors into who I am becoming as I came alongside her on both the in-classroom and out-of-classroom spaces at Ravine Elementary School. Thank you, Julie, for the privilege of spending these moments with you.

Endnote: "I'm a different kind of old" (Julie, Field notes, October 21, 2002).

Chapter 5: Fareda: Where Is Home?

Stories to Tell

Fareda was a smiling 7-year-old girl with dreamy eyes and long dark hair in the Grade 1/2 classroom where I had been doing my doctoral fieldwork. Fareda, her parents, and her older sister moved from Pakistan to this city in western Canada when she was almost five years old, and she started Kindergarten at Ravine Elementary School part way through that year. In the fall of 2002, when I discussed with Fareda's teacher, Laura (Transcripts, October 23, 2002, p. 22), and principal, Jeanette (Field notes, October 16, 2002), the possibility of inviting her to be part of the lunchtime group of four children who would be the focus of my research, they both told me that maybe I should choose someone else, because Fareda was so quiet and would not have much to say. Although she was quiet in the classroom, when I took small groups of children to the library to read to them and have conversations around the books we read, I found Fareda began gradually to talk about her life.

> In early fall of 2002, Fareda, now a Grade 2 student, made her first reference to her memories of living in Pakistan. I was reading a book, *Floss* (Lewis, 1992), about a sheepdog in Britain, to a small group one day, because dogs were a favourite topic among some of these children. As I opened the first page, before I started to read, Fareda noticed the two sheep on the page and said that she had a sheep. I asked if she lived on a farm, thinking that it was unlikely. She said no, but that her family had a sheep in Pakistan when they lived there. This was the

> first time she had referred to her country of origin. (Field notes, September 25, 2002)

I had not chosen this book about a sheepdog with Fareda in mind. I knew several other children in the group who were very interested in dogs, and I thought of them as I brought this book to school that day. It was a surprise to me when Fareda spoke up and told us she had a sheep. I noted the improvised nature of book conversations in this moment. Although I planned to read *Floss* (Lewis, 1992), I could not have imagined the connection Fareda made with the book. Fareda had come almost daily to sit beside me in class, but up to this point she mostly asked about what I was writing or wanted me to read with her. She had not told me about herself, and she did seem somewhat reserved. In late September, I was wondering who might be interested in taking part in the lunchtime book conversations I was planning. When I asked her if she would like to join the lunchtime group, Fareda agreed immediately.

After that day when we read *Floss* (Lewis, 1992), Fareda began to tell me almost daily of her family's plans to move back to Pakistan eventually, or "my country" as she called it.

> At recess, Fareda came to me and said, "I am moving back to my country, maybe at summer. Before Grade 3. It's a secret. But you can tell the kids at lunch." She was referring to our lunchtime group, where Fareda and three other children joined me in the Kindergarten classroom to read children's literature and talk about our lives. I was pleased that Fareda saw this as a place where she could share her news. (Field notes, November 7, 2002)

It was as if sharing that connection through the book opened a space for Fareda to begin to tell her stories. She said her family might move when she was in Grade 3. She talked about this quite regularly, and seemed ambivalent about the prospect. She also began to tell me stories of her move to Canada a year and a half earlier. I realized that the lunchtime book group and our other conversations might be a space where Fareda could think and talk about her stories to live by as she negotiated her life in two countries. She seemed concerned with both the move she and her family made to Canada and the possible move back to Pakistan.

Fareda's Story: Moving to Canada

When I asked Fareda if I could scribe a story for her, on November 14, 2002, she happily agreed. I had been scribing stories for the other children in the lunchtime group and found it interesting how they would speak very slowly, to give me time to write down their words. I had my pencil poised to begin a story with Fareda on this chilly November morning, but Fareda began to talk rapidly about her memories of coming to Canada and about her life in preschool in Pakistan. I could not possibly write as fast as her stories poured out, so I just sat and listened (I was glad I had the tape recorder on), asking questions now and then when Fareda paused for breath.

> Fareda began by talking about how she and her sister had learned that holding your middle finger up is a "bad sign" in Canada. Her sister had used her middle finger to point to something at school, and was quickly told by other children not to use that finger. Fareda then told me a bit about going to playschool in Pakistan

> before coming to Canada. "And in the old country, whenever you say one wrong word, they hit with a stick." (Transcript, scribing conversation with Fareda, November 14, 2002). Fareda told me that her older sister wore a garment called a shakamin to school in Grade 1 in Pakistan, but Fareda just wore a dress to playschool. (Field notes, November 14, 2002)

Fareda seemed to have these stories just on the tip of her tongue ready to tell. I thought about how Jeanette and Laura said Fareda was so quiet. I wondered about how this space for Fareda to tell her stories seemed to open up between us in the moments we had together in the classroom and at lunchtime. Her stories of her life in Pakistan and in Canada were, for me, rich glimpses into how Fareda was negotiating tensions she felt around these two places she called home. I began to see that Fareda's retellings might also be providing her with opportunities to understand her story to live by in new ways.

> Fareda remembered her first day of school at Ravine School, after arriving from Pakistan. "Yeah, I was shivering and I was in a scared mood, and then I said, I didn't say…I was speaking in a different language, and she didn't know what I was saying. When it was recess, I went home. I thought it was time to go home. And the next day, my dad said, 'Try it one more time,' and I tried it one more time." (Transcript, scribing conversation with Fareda, November 14, 2002)

Fareda's description of coming to school for the first time, in a place where none of the teachers knew her language and she did not know theirs, reflected her understanding of her experiences as a new student in a new school in a new country, as she looked back on that day, a year and a half later. Fareda smiled as she told this story, perhaps finding it slightly amusing from this vantage point. From her story, however, I could imagine that those first days were indeed difficult as she lived them. What must it have been like to enter that school, so different from her playschool in Pakistan? What must it have been like for her parents to send this five year old to school those first days? Her father's gentle encouragement to "Try it one more time" seemed enough for her to continue in what must have been a very challenging situation. I was struck by the courage of this little girl and her family.

> Fareda told me that she began to talk in English very quietly, and then she got "louder and louder." She said she never put her hand up in Kindergarten, but just kept quiet. Now that she is in Grade 2, she says she is getting more comfortable and talking more in the classroom. (Field notes, November 14, 2002)

This part of Fareda's story seemed to conflict with the school story I was told of her as a quiet child with little to say. Fareda said she thought she was talking more, getting "louder and louder" in school. How Fareda saw herself was not the same as how the school storied her, it seemed. I wonder whether the school story of Fareda would interrupt Fareda's story to live by, whether being storied as not having much to say might keep her on the margins of school life, whether she herself might begin to believe that she belonged there. Or would Fareda find a way to create a different plotline in the face of this challenge?

Book Conversation Moments with Fareda

Although we had lunchtime book group on Thursdays, I also continued to take groups of children to the library or Room 3, the empty classroom in the school, to read with them during Station time, throughout the fall of 2002. Station time in Laura's classroom involved children, in small assigned groups, moving through various activities such as a writing station, an art station, and a computer station. Laura agreed to let me take one group at a time to read and talk with me in another room, during this time. Children shifted from one station to the next about every 20 minutes, so that is how long I had with each group, although Laura did not mind when sometimes we stayed longer.

Although Fareda was storied as quiet in school, she became increasingly talkative in our small group book conversations during Stations, as well as in our lunchtime book group. When Fareda and Ricky (a quiet, almost entirely silent, child in class, whose family moved to Canada from India just before he was born) were in a small group with me, they often talked about their lives outside of school.

> I read *The Cookie-Store Cat* (Rylant, 1999) to Fareda, Tim, and Ricky in the library this morning. The children drew pictures as we talked afterwards. Fareda said, "I'll draw the old man" (This was one of the bakers in the book). She began to sing, "This old man, he played one…" Fareda is so talkative now. I find it hard to remember how quiet she seemed to be at the beginning of the year. Fareda looked out the window and told me she lives just across the road, behind the apartment buildings. Ricky said he knows where she lives, because he used to live close by, but now he has moved. He said he saw Fareda with her sister and her

> older cousin. Fareda talked about her big cousin who is no longer in school. She said he is as tall as the ceiling in the library. I was surprised to hear Ricky talking so confidently and openly during this conversation. This is the first time I have heard him speak up. He seems to feel more confident around Fareda. (Field notes, November 4, 2002)

At this time, I began to notice that when I was able to have Ricky in the same small group with Fareda, he was much more comfortable and willing to take part in the conversation. It seemed these two children shared something in common…was it that they lived near each other? Or that both had families who moved to Canada from other countries? Or perhaps they were both seen as quiet in school and had begun to find a place to move out of that school story of themselves, in coming to our book group.

> I read *No, David!* (Shannon, 2002) to Fareda, Ricky, and Tim in the library today. This book was about a little boy who seemed to find things to do that got him into lots of trouble. Perhaps it made Fareda think of her family, because she began to talk about her older brother, who still lives in her country, as she often calls Pakistan. She said he was very nice to her and sometimes sent her things. Ricky asked her if that was Pakistan she was referring to. When she nodded, he told us that his older sister had to stay in India to help his grandfather. I asked Ricky if he had been born in India, and he said no, that he was born in Canada. His older sister had been here, he said, but she had had to leave and go back to India to his grandfather. (Field notes, November 25, 2002)

Ricky talked clearly, at an appropriate volume, during this conversation, and I thought about his extremely quiet voice in class, and how this smaller group situation and Fareda's presence seemed to provide a space for him to tell his stories. Both children had important narratives to tell and retell, once they found a place to do so.

> I read *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996) to Fareda and Julie this morning. Julie talked about how the kitchen of Mary, the elderly Cree woman who is the central character, reminded her of her own Gookum's kitchen. Then Fareda told us that Mary made her think of her grandmother, who lives in Pakistan. She said her grandmother's hair was white like Mary's, and she could not move around easily anymore. Fareda remarked that soon she would see her grandmother, when her family moved back to Pakistan. She said that she wished she could be here for Grade 3 instead of in Pakistan. (Field notes, November 20, 2002)

This statement, like many others Fareda made in the fall of 2002, illustrates the uncertainty Fareda appeared to feel about going back to Pakistan. Fareda seemed to be struggling with a dilemma: it would be good to see her grandmother, but she did not want to leave the familiarity of her home here in Canada.

A Gift for Gita: Connections to Home Life

In late November 2002, I found a book about a girl who came to Canada from India, called *A Gift for Gita* (Gilmore, 1998). The girl's family was considering moving back to India and she didn't want to go. She felt her home was here in Canada. This book seemed as though it might further the conversation with Fareda around her family's possible return to Pakistan, so I asked her, along with a group of four other children, to come read it with me during Station time. Two other children in the group, Felicia and Ricky, had families who came to Canada from India in the past few years.

> I began by telling the children that I had a book about a girl called Gita. When I showed the cover, Fareda noticed right away that the nesting doll on the cover had a bindhi on her forehead. Ricky pointed to the doll's dress, which had a flowing part that came up over her head. He told me the word for this in his family's language. (Field notes, November 27, 2002)

Ricky again found a space to tell a bit of his story. I wondered as we began to read this book if the comfort of having Fareda and Felicia beside him, and looking at a book with illustrations familiar from his home context, made Ricky feel he could venture a comment about the book's cover.

> As I began to read *A Gift for Gita* (Gilmore, 1998), we found that Gita's grandmother is visiting from India. I heard a sharp intake of breath. I saw, out of the corner of my eye, Fareda and Ricky exchange a look and a smile. In the book, Gita discovered that her family was considering a move back to India, after living in Canada for several years. After a few pages, Fareda stopped me to say, in wonder, "That's just like me!" (Field notes, November 27, 2002)

As I read the book, I was aware that Fareda, Felicia, and Ricky were all paying very close attention to this story. Their concentration made me think about how unusual it was for them to be able to bring their life stories into school. What must it be like to move to a new country, finding perhaps few reminders of the home you left behind, in public places like school? Was this book opening a space for Fareda, Ricky, and Felicia to bring a bit of their lives into the school? For Fareda, in particular, the book seemed very important. The next day, Fareda searched the school library, found this book, and borrowed it. Fareda was not a keen library user generally, so this was a noticeable event. She then asked if she could use the book to draw pictures from, for a collage she was making about her experiences in school. She also continued to tell me of her family's unfolding plans to return to Pakistan, as she understood them. Fareda and I reread this book several times over the next year and a half.

In early December 2002, Fareda was again part of a group of five children who went with me to Room 3, the empty classroom, to read during Stations. I took a couple of books with me, as I often did by this time. When we gathered on the floor in the rather barren empty classroom this morning, Fareda, Ricky, and Felicia were in the group, all of whom were with us when I read *A Gift for Gita* (Gilmore, 1998) on November 27, 2002. This was the first time we had been together since that day. I spread out the blankets I brought along to make this space a bit more comfortable and looked at the children finding places to sit or lie down near me.

> As we gathered that day, there was an intensity in the way those three (Fareda, Ricky, and Felicia) looked at me, that made me think that they were looking for something meaty, something real, maybe something sad, something that would give them a chance to tell their stories. (Field notes, December 2, 2002)

In that moment I glimpsed the huge responsibility I had as I spent more time in relation with Fareda and the other children. In reading *A Gift for Gita* (Gilmore, 1998) with them, I started something. I opened, with them, a space to talk about their own stories to live by, a space they did not commonly experience in school.

Tension #1: Responsibilities in Relation With Fareda

In moments like this one, when Fareda, Ricky, and Felicia sat watching me closely, waiting to see what book I would read, I realized my position as a researcher in this classroom was much more than a brief blip in these children's lives and in mine. The time we spent together had many layers of meaning. There was the way Fareda began to be more talkative and outgoing, not only in our group, but with others as well; for example, her leadership when I read The Cookie Store Cat (Rylant, 1999). This began to provide a counter-story to the school story of Fareda as quiet and with little to say. There was Ricky's coming to voice in our group. Would this spread to the classroom? There was Fareda's growing understanding that she could use these book conversations to talk about and try to make sense of her stories to live by, stories that included a home in Pakistan and a home in Canada. There was the sense that when I took these children in a small group to read and talk, something could happen…something special.

I wondered what would happen if I didn't find ways to open that space with the children that day. I felt a strong responsibility to continue to listen and learn in relation with Fareda and her classmates. The tension for me was in the struggle to remain wide awake, in the way of which Greene (1995) speaks, awake to the possibilities in our gatherings and to the cues and openings Fareda and others

provided me with each day. It was too easy, some days, to remain on the surface of things, to smooth over comments or expressions children made, cues that could lead us into perhaps hard but important spaces. As I became aware of Fareda, Ricky, and Felicia watching me that day, I was, at least for the moment, awake to the imperative for me to continue to find ways to make these spaces in the book conversations we shared.

> On this day, as we gathered, I felt the expectancy from Fareda, Ricky, and Felicia. I chose *Something Beautiful* (Wyeth, 1998), a book about a young African American girl called Samantha who lives in a rundown urban neighbourhood. She was looking for something beautiful in and around the trashed courtyard and bleak, dangerous streets that were her home territory. One of the first illustrations showed the front door of Samantha's apartment. Broken glass and garbage were on the ground and there was graffiti on the apartment door. Fareda said that once, in her "old country," someone wrote "bad things" on the walls of her family's home. Ricky told us that he had seen grafitti here in this city. James agreed that there is graffiti here too. Eli said the broken glass looks kind of pretty even though it is garbage. (Field notes, December 2, 2002)

Although this book was not about a situation or a place that Fareda experienced directly, she was finding connections with the images and text, connections that allowed her to draw on her knowing of her home place in Pakistan. Although she had not been there for a year and a half, that home place in Pakistan often seemed to be on Fareda's mind.

Fareda led the rest of us into considering links between Samantha's home and the places we knew.

> On the next page was a homeless old woman sleeping in a cardboard box outside Samantha's building, with a piece of plastic for a sheet. I wondered aloud about how difficult it must be for homeless people in the city to live, especially when it is cold outside in the winter. There were comments from Eli and James about finding cardboard to keep warm. Fareda's eyes lit up and she told us about how she and her family would sleep outdoors on the roof sometimes and watch the stars, on warm nights in their home in Pakistan. She said it was such fun lying there, cozy in a blanket, watching the stars. Ricky said he would like to do that too. (Field notes, December 2, 2002)

This memory seemed to hold something beautiful for Fareda, just as the storybook character, Samantha, in the book, finally found something beautiful in her home, as she looked around her place thoughtfully. Fareda was able to forge a strong personal connection with the book, and her words helped others do this too. More than that, however, I was beginning to realize that Fareda was using these book conversations to tell and retell stories from her life, perhaps in ways that helped her compose a story to live by in the midst of worries about whether or not her family would be moving back to Pakistan. I watched in wonder as Fareda found ways to bring her own stories out through connections with the books we read.

A Trip to Pakistan

In March 2003, Fareda and her family went to Pakistan for a two-month visit. Because I was away from the school from January to May 1, 2003, I was not there when Fareda left. However, I was in the classroom on the day she returned to school after this long trip, in May 2003. She seemed very sleepy that first day back, perhaps due to jet lag. She was also very quiet, almost completely silent. Miss Green said at lunchtime that Fareda told her she had forgotten how to speak English. I took a small group, that included Fareda, to the library to read a book, and she did not say a word while we were there (Field notes, May 1, 2003). I wondered what it was like for her to have been immersed in another culture and language for two months and then to return to school in Canada again. I wanted to ask Fareda about the trip and about how and when she found out that she was not going back to Pakistan permanently, just for a two-month trip. Did she know it before she got on the airplane to leave Canada? Or did she find out later in the trip? What was her time in Pakistan, with her extended family, like? But Fareda's silence and fatigue meant that this first day back was not the time to inquire with her into her experiences. Sometimes creating spaces for children to explore their stories to live by may mean creating spaces for quiet time too, I think as I look back to that day.

> A few days later, I asked Fareda to come with me to an empty classroom, so I could read her a piece that I had written about her as part of our research project. She seemed much more rested and eager to talk on this day. As I read the piece to her, Fareda stopped me often to comment or expand on a sentence I'd written. When I read that she was five when her family came to Canada, she corrected me

> and said that she was almost five. She became very animated and told me several stories about her recent trip to Pakistan. She told me about having an older sister and brother in Pakistan, and how glad the sister was to see them. When we read the part in my writing about Fareda's memories of playschool in Pakistan and the clothes she and her sister wore, she stood up and showed me how the clothes would look on her, the long skirt, the headscarf, and the dress, and she told me the names for each article of clothing. (Field notes, May 7, 2003)

Fareda's stories were filled with family and sounded very happy. Because the writing I was reading with her was about her life before she returned to Pakistan, I wondered if she would see differences between how she felt before leaving on this trip and her feelings afterward. The conversation turned in that direction as we read on.

> Fareda talked about how she had not wanted to go to Pakistan this spring. She said she felt as if she did not want to leave her home. She told me that her father had said to her, "Well, you can stay here, but the rest of us are going to go." Not much of an option when you are seven years old. Then when it was time to leave Pakistan at the end of her trip, Fareda did not want to leave there either. She smiled as she said this, as if to indicate that she understood the irony of her situation. (Field notes, May 7, 2003)

Fareda's ambivalence makes me think about home places and how home can be a shifting and nebulous concept. After the months Fareda spent worrying about the impending trip to Pakistan, her fears about never returning to Canada were not realized. She had come home again. And yet, while she was in Pakistan surrounded by her grandmother and other family members, she had grown very comfortable. As the visit was ending, Fareda felt she did not want to leave her home in Pakistan. It was in this conversation with Fareda that I began to consider how home can be more than one place; perhaps Fareda will grow up with two homes, one in Canada and one in Pakistan.

Reading My Writing to Fareda

After I read some of my writing to Fareda on May 8, 2003, we talked about her pseudonym and she decided Fareda was the name for her. I mentioned I would read some of my writing to James after recess, and that I read some to Julie and Bob the day before. Fareda asked me "Where do you put these?" She was referring to the pages of writing I was sharing with each of the four children. I was glad to hear her question about this, because it showed she was actively interested in the process and in what would happen next. I explained I would continue writing over the summer and fall, and that I would be back to read some more to Fareda and the others next year in Grade 3. "Can we take them home?" Fareda asked about the finished stories. I said yes, that I would have one for each of the four children (Transcripts, May 8, 2003, p. 20).

After that, Fareda asked me not to go away, and I wished, too, that I didn't have to go back to Nova Scotia for so long. My family and my work are on the other side of the country. This is much more difficult than I imagined it would be when I began this research, and I find the relationship growing between us continues to draw me westward. As we thought about my coming travels, Fareda wondered what would happen if she went back to Pakistan and I tried to bring more stories to Ravine School for her. "How about I go to Pakistan and you did it, and you bring it there?" Fareda asked with a smile. "I'd love to come to Pakistan and see you," I responded, smiling too, "Or I could find your address and send it to you." "I don't think we have an address in Pakistan," Fareda worried. And then she said, "I don't want to go back there now" (Transcripts, May 8, 2003, p. 25). There it is again, that feeling of being unsure about where she wants to be, about where home is for Fareda.

Tension #2: Home Places

As Fareda was travelling to Pakistan and wondering where her home really was, I was living a parallel story of living in more than one place, and feeling some ambiguity about what home meant for me. I had been living in western Canada as a doctoral student, but moved to Nova Scotia to accept a faculty position at a university there in January 2003. I grew up in Nova Scotia, but lived in western Canada for many years too, and had many strong ties there. I looked back with longing at the west as I spent those first months in my new position in Nova Scotia. Where was my home? Could I too have more than one home? It was a tension I was feeling at the same time that I was coming to know Fareda's struggles to understand where home was for her. I did not explore this parallel at the time, either with Fareda or on my own. I did not acknowledge it, in fact. It is only now, over a year later, that I am writing of it for the first time. Why is that? Am I still caught up in trying to keep myself at a distance from the inquiry? There is an ongoing peeling

back of layers in this narrative inquiry process, it seems, and just when I think there can't possibly be any more, another one loosens and flakes away.

Fareda and Grandfather's Journey

In the spring I found another book which I thought might find a place in Fareda's imagination, as *A Gift for Gita* (Gilmore, 1998) had. I borrowed this book from a friend and brought it with me to school in June, 2003.

> Fareda and I read *Grandfather's Journey* (Say, 2003) together this morning. I had brought this book along with several others, and Fareda chose this one when we went to Room 3 to read that day. In *Grandfather's Journey*, a young man grows up in Japan, moves to the United States and spends much of his adult life there. A part of him always longs to return to Japan, and eventually he does. Once he is back in Japan, he finds that while he is delighted to be there, he is somewhat lonesome for his life in the United States. The difficulties and the joys of having two homes are made clear in this poignant story. I wondered what Fareda would think of this book, as she had been talking with me about her two home places, western Canada and Pakistan, throughout this school year. On this day, before we read the book, Fareda began to tell me of her fond memories of sleeping beside her ailing grandmother when she and her parents were in Pakistan this spring for six weeks (Field notes, June 11, 2003).

> "Sometimes I sit with her and talk, because she…she's a little bit sick. One time I waked up in the night time and my grandma was waked up and nobody else was awake. So I slept where my grandma was. There was a bed with my grandma sleeping in it, and then there was another bed, so I slept there." (Transcripts, June 11, 2003, p. 3)

As Fareda told me this story, I could imagine how difficult it must have been to leave Pakistan and return to Canada, saying goodbye to her grandmother who is not in good health. As I look back on that conversation, I think about Fareda's parents and the strength they must have, to leave their families and move to a new country so far away.

On the other hand, Fareda also told me about how glad she was that she didn't have to go to school in Pakistan. Her story of Pakistan's schools is not a positive one. "They hit you there, and here they don't. They have desks that people stick their gum on, and then there's trash all around" (Transcripts, June 11, 2003, p. 5). Fareda indicated there was some talk in her family about staying in Pakistan, during this trip, but that her father decided they would return to Canada, because of the school situation. "And then my dad says no, it's too much. Because over there they have, they don't have classes like this" (p. 5). These words give me a glimpse into the story Fareda knows about schools here in Canada, and the contrasts with her story of schools in Pakistan. This knowing comes partly through her father's words and partly from her own memories of school from two years ago when she attended school in Pakistan before moving to Canada.

As we began to read *Grandfather's Journey* (Say, 2003), Fareda and I sat closer together on the carpet of Room 3, the empty classroom, facing the window on this sunny morning, the only people in the room. Fareda listened attentively as I read. We reached the page where the grandfather, now living in California, has a wife from Japan and a fine daughter who is growing up. The grandfather began to think more and more about the mountains and rivers of his home, and of his old friends. The book states, "He surrounded himself with song birds, but he could not forget" (Say, 2003, unpaged). Fareda commented, "But if he had a button" (Transcripts, June 11, 2003, p. 16). I did not understand Fareda's meaning, and at first I didn't follow up on this comment, but luckily Fareda persisted. "A button here (pointing to the page), so he can touch it, and then he can remember everything that he did" (p. 17). I still was not following Fareda's idea, so she patiently kept on. "There's a story called, I forget what it's called. And something that's little and little and it turns into a button…and then the button gets lost, the button gets lost" (p. 17). This direct reference to another children's book helps me to understand at last. "Oh, *Something from Nothing*! Is that the story?" (Transcripts, June 11, p. 17)

It seemed that Fareda was remembering how the little boy in *Something from Nothing* (Gilman, 2000) had a button covered in fabric from his baby blanket, made by his grandfather. Whenever he touched the button, he could remember many stories from his childhood, all related to the blanket, which passed though many stages (jacket, vest, handkerchief) until finally there was just enough fabric left for a button. The button helped the boy remember, so Fareda creatively thought about how a button might help the grandfather in *Grandfather's Journey* (Say, 2003) to hold on to his memories.

Tension #3: Awakeness

I would like to say that I followed up on this idea and that we talked more about what helps us hold onto memories of home. I did not. I continued on with the story, perhaps in a rush due to time constraints. Here again I bumped up against the difficulties of keeping awake to the openings children provide for us to explore our stories to live by. Fareda planted the seed of a wonderful conversation here, about how we keep memories alive, how we tell and retell family stories and other special stories, holding them like buttons in our clumsy fingers, sometimes letting them slip and become lost. I did not give Fareda space to have this conversation with me, because I was concerned with the school story that says we must be on time, not late. If I said I would be back in the classroom with Fareda at 11:45 am, I would make sure I was back. This took precedence over my conversation with Fareda, I regretfully note. I was, and am, living with the tension between attending to the lives of the people with whom I am in relation, and the notions of promptness and expediency that pervade schools, universities, and, I think, much of our society.

Looking back to that day, I wonder what things help Fareda keep her memories of family and events in Pakistan in her mind. I think about how photographs provide a metaphoric button for me to hold. I look at baby pictures of my children and can recall the intense, intimate days of becoming a mother. In flipping through photos from my childhood, I can sometimes recall just how I was feeling when that picture was taken, and the context around it (rosy cheeked after a heated argument with one of my sisters, for example). Fareda, what are your ways of holding on to memories in your young life? What might I have learned had I taken time to ask you this?

> Later that same day, Fareda told me that she actually has three homes. "One here, and home in Pakistan, and a home in our new house" (Transcripts, June 11, 2003, p. 12). Fareda told me that they were building a new house in Pakistan because the old one was not in good repair. I wondered why this was happening if the family is living here in western Canada. (Field notes, June 11, 2003)

Fareda seemed to be developing a sense of home as a shifting, changeable place. She did not appear upset about this, on this June day, although I vividly recalled her worries about leaving for Pakistan in early spring, worries that she might not be able to come back to Canada. These worries seemed diminished now, but sometimes I wonder if they are there, just below the surface.

A Letter to Fareda

In the fall of 2003, from my home in Nova Scotia, I wrote letters to each of the four children in the lunchtime book conversations, as I pored over my field notes and thought about each child and the moments we shared, wondering about what might be happening in their lives since June 2003, when I last saw them. This is the letter I wrote to Fareda and shared with her during my November 2003 visit to Ravine Elementary School.

November 12, 2003

Dear Fareda,

It seems like so long since I've seen you. I wonder if you have lost any more teeth. Do you remember losing that one last spring that was bothering you so much? You showed that loose tooth to me every day, and when it finally came out, you told me that it didn't even bleed (Transcripts, May 8, 2003, p. 7).

I remember how you had just arrived back from Pakistan when I visited your classroom last spring. You talked to me about your trip and about the family members you spent time with in Pakistan, like your sister, Jasmine, and also Sunara. Was she a sister or a cousin?

You talked about taking another trip soon. "When we go to Pakistan, when we're done going to Pakistan, we're going to right away go on to Disneyland. And after that, we're going to Jasper and Banff. We're going to take our roller blades" (Transcripts, May 8, 2003, p. 12). I think your plans for this next trip sound exciting. I remember you were worried about going to Pakistan this time. You were not sure if you would be coming back again. Now that you are back in Canada, this next trip seems less intimidating. I wonder what you are thinking about travelling now.

Sometimes I think about how you told me last May that when it was time to get on the plane to Pakistan, you didn't want to go, to leave home. Then, when it was time to come back to Canada after six weeks, you didn't want to leave Pakistan. (Transcripts, May 8, 2003, p. 9). You told me this with a smile, and I was warmed by your smile and the depth of understanding you brought to the tricky question of what home means to us. I *think of all the family members that you spent time with in Pakistan, and how hard it must have been for you, your sister, and your parents to leave them. Your words remind me of times in my life when I have lived far from my family, and how sometimes I'm not at all sure where home is.*

Fareda, I want to ask you more about a building you told me about in Pakistan. I think you called it a mustich. "It's like a church, but it's not English," you said. "When you go inside, you have to take off your roller blades and your shoes because God doesn't like, you have to be all clean, right?" (Transcripts, May 8, 2003, p. 13). There are two rooms, you told me, one room where boys read and pray to God, and "if you open the next door, the back door, then you see the girls" (Transcripts, May 8, 2003, p. 14). I think about some of the churches I have been inside, and the strong traditions they uphold.

You gave me wonderful glimpses into your trip to Pakistan, Fareda, and I was (and am) caught up in the excitement of your journey. Sometimes I am not sure I have understood exactly the scenes you described for me. For example, I have an image in my head of the mustich, but it may not be closely related to the image you have of this building. Another example of this is the flying coach you told me about going on, from Lahore to Rawalpindi (Field notes, May 7, 2003, p. 2). When I asked what a flying coach was, you "held out your arms like wings, and said it was really fast" (Field notes, May 7, 2003, p. 2), but when I asked you if it was an airplane, you shook your head. So I am imagining a fast train, but that might not be it at all.

There is so much I do not know about your trip, and in fact, your life, Fareda. Talking with you makes me realize how little we really know of each other, just a thin sliver of each other's lives. Although we may have spend hours together in the same room, we may be almost strangers. And even though we have made a beginning attempt to open up that space between us, by reading and talking together, there are moments like this when I am aware of how very little I know you. You help me understand this, and yet you give me hope that this is an important direction to keep moving toward.

Fareda, you also link your stories to larger world events in ways that fascinate me. Your unique child's eye view of the sometimes strained relationship between India and Pakistan surfaced when you told me you have visited a much bigger mustich in a different country. I made a guess and asked if that country was India. You responded immediately, "No, we don't go there." When I asked why, you replied, "Because India...when the plane crashed, right, Pakistan was in the building." "In the building?" I repeated. "Yeah, the airplane went through Pakistan, that's why we don't go to India" (Transcripts, May 8, 2003, p. 16). This version of an airplane bombing or hijacking seems to be part of your story of India, a way that you define who you are as a person of Pakistani origin. Another small piece in my gradual knowing of you.

Thank you for telling me some of your stories, Fareda. You have helped me learn a great deal, and I think we have more to say the longer we are together.

Love, Anne

When I read this letter to Fareda, she told me that she and her family might be moving again, to a new house in the city. I asked if she would go to a different school, and she replied, “First my dad said that we’re going to move to a different school, but I’m like, ‘No, no, let’s just stay here in Ravine Elementary’” (Transcript of conversation with Fareda, November 20, 2003, p. 4). Fareda seemed to want to continue to go to this school, where she had made memories and friends. She corrected the spelling of her sister’s and cousin’s names, and told me her family’s trip to Jasper and Banff had been postponed to the next summer. Fareda also said she would be going to Pakistan for Grade 4. Twice she repeated, “And then I have to come back and and then I have to go again” (p. 6). Fareda seemed to be getting the idea that her life might involve time spent in both Pakistan and in Canada. In contrast to her worries a year earlier, she did not seem upset about another possible trip to Pakistan. The possibility of moving between these two worlds was one that seemed to be opening up for Fareda. She mentioned her grandmother when I read a part of the letter about family members. “My dad’s mom is feeling too sick…and she’s going to come to Canada with us, and then we’re going to stay in Canada” (p. 7).

Fareda also talked about how when she is at prayer in the mosque, she reads the prayers in Urdu, her family’s language. I asked if she could read in two languages. I knew Fareda spoke two languages, English and her family’s first language, but I did not realize she could read in both languages. “I went to the hospital and they said my first language was English but my first language is Urdu…I don’t know which one was my first language” (p. 12). Fareda wrote some letters of the Urdu alphabet on my notebook for me and told me how to say them.

I did not finish reading the letter to Fareda during the conversation we had on November 20, 2003, because we had so much to talk about between the lines. I planned to finish reading the letter with her the next week. However, Fareda was not there the days I was at the school the next week. It was the end of Ramadan, and Fareda was at home, celebrating this important holiday with her family. I was, at first, disappointed not to talk with Fareda again during this visit, but then I realized the significance of her time away from school. In her absence, I thought about how Fareda was living out a key plotline in her story of who she was and who she was becoming.

Fareda was, I imagined, fully present to the celebration taking place in her home here in Canada, a powerful link with her home back in Pakistan. She talked with me about the things she and her family would do at the end of Ramadan. "On Wednesday, we're doing Eid. It's where everybody wears pretty clothes and shiny [things] and we go outside and then we go to the mosque where we read stuff…and then the parents have to give money to the kids" (Transcript, November 20, 2003, p. 3). Was this one way Fareda would come to better understand her own stories to live by as a Canadian with strong connections to her other home in Pakistan? By knowing a little bit of what she might be doing that day at home, I learned more from Fareda about how she lives between two or more worlds in her life. By her absence that day, Fareda reminded me about the multiple stories she lives by as daughter, student, Canadian, new immigrant, and research participant.

Creating a Piece of Fiction for Fareda

Throughout this chapter, I mentioned the children's book *A Gift for Gita* (Gilmore, 1998), which Fareda read and reread with me and on her own. *A Gift for Gita* is about a young girl, Gita, who moved to Canada from India with her family, three years ago, and whose grandmother was visiting from India. The family had fun showing the grandmother around their home and community. Suddenly the father found out that he was to be transferred back to India. The grandmother was overjoyed at this possibility, but Gita was very upset, because she felt that Canada was now her home. At the same time, she missed her life in India. In the end, the family decides not to move, but Gita has been brought face-to-face with the idea that her home may not be just in one place, and who she is may not be so neatly defined.

I wrote the following fictional piece inspired by *A Gift for Gita* (Gilmore, 1998) and based on field texts that I have gathered over the nearly two years I spent in conversation with Fareda in the classroom, in the lunchtime book group, and in out-of-classroom spaces on the school landscape. Fareda was thrilled when we read *A Gift for Gita*; it seemed to me to provide a mirror in which she could see some of the complexities of her life as a child who moved with her family to Canada from Pakistan two years earlier.

Fareda's Journey

Today was the big day. For months Fareda had known this day was coming. Her father and mother had been making plans and preparing. Her big sister Kala was as *excited as her parents to be returning to Pakistan for a visit, after moving to Canada two years ago. Fareda was not so sure she wanted to go.*

When Fareda came to Canada she was five years old. She smiled when she remembered how quiet she was in Kindergarten. She couldn't understand what Mrs. Smith was saying to her on her first day at her new school, but she understood her big smile.

Now Fareda was much older, in second grade, and she knew all about school in Canada now. She was not so quiet anymore, and she had fun there most days. Fareda's favourite things at school were storytime and writing in her journal.

As Fareda zipped up her suitcase, she frowned. What if Daddy and Mommy decided that they would stay in Pakistan, once they got there? Fareda was worried about that. She wanted to see her grandmother and other family members, but she was a little bit afraid that if she left here, she would not come back home to Canada.

"Time to go, Fareda!" called her father from the front door. "We have a plane to catch!" Fareda sat on her bed and tried not to cry. "We don't want to leave you behind!" joked Daddy. "Please hurry!"

Fareda had no choice. She picked up her bag and walked slowly to the front door. Soon they were on their way to the airport.

The plane trip was very long and Fareda slept a lot. She was very glad when it was finally time to get off the plane in Pakistan. As she walked into the airport, she saw her grandmother and sisters and cousins all waiting there to meet her and Kala and Daddy and Mommy. What a happy time, hugging and kissing, everyone talking at once!

It was so beautiful and warm here! Fareda was glad not to have to bundle up in her winter clothes as she did at home in Canada at this time of year. Fareda looked at the colourful, busy city streets they passed as they went to their house. Going home, Daddy said. Fareda was not so sure about this. Fareda noticed cages with small green, red, and blue birds in them as they drove along. She remembered having a little green bird in a cage a long time ago, before she had moved to Canada.

As the days passed, Fareda had lots of fun. She didn't have to go to school here in Pakistan, so she had time to do other things. She and Kala went roller blading sometimes, and her family had many wonderful meals and parties for them.

One of Fareda's favorite things happened on warm nights when the stars were out. Fareda's father would put a sofa bed outside and they would lie there, wrapped in blankets, watching the flickering stars in the big night sky. Sometimes Fareda wondered if these stars looked the same in Canada. It was so cold when she had left; she couldn't imagine lying outdoors watching the stars there!

Other nights, Fareda would wake up and hear her grandmother calling out. Fareda's grandmother had been very sick; she couldn't even talk for a while. But she was getting better. The first time her grandmother called like that, Fareda heard her before anyone else, and went to lie on the bed beside her. This seemed to make her grandmother feel better, and they both went back to sleep. After that, Fareda slept beside her grandmother often. She was glad to be close to her.

The days flew by and before Fareda knew it, it was time to leave Pakistan and go back to Canada. How had the time passed so quickly? Now Fareda realized that she *didn't want to leave her home in Pakistan. She felt very sad saying goodbye to her grandmother and sisters and cousins. So did her father and mother and Kala.*

Fareda and her family were soon on the airplane that was taking them to Canada. As Fareda looked out the window at the tiny disappearing piece of Pakistan below them, she wished she could have stayed there.

The next day, after riding on three different planes, and then getting a taxi to their house, Fareda and her family were back in their Canadian home. Fareda was very tired and slept for a long time.

The next morning, Daddy said it was time for school. Fareda felt as though she was in a dream. How could she be here in Canada? She had just been sleeping under the stars with her cousins and sisters in the warm Pakistan night. Hadn't she?

A few days later, Fareda sat on her bed and dressed her Barbie. She had had fun at school today. She had mixed different colours of jello together to make green, purple, and orange. Then she ate them! Fareda thought about how glad she was to be here at home again. But she also remembered how Pakistan was her home too, and how she had wonderful memories from her time there. It was kind of like having two homes, Fareda realized. And it was almost like there were two Faredas: one here in Canada, and one in Pakistan. Fareda smiled as she brushed Barbie's hair. She was lucky to have two homes, she decided.

On April 23, 2004, during my last visit to Ravine Elementary School, I went to Fareda's Grade 3/4 classroom to ask her if she would like to come for a conversation with me. I brought along the above piece to read with her.

> Fareda seemed very happy to see me, as I was to see her. She came close and we walked together down the long hallway toward the library. As soon as we left the classroom, Fareda said to me, "My grandmother died." I knew right away she was talking about her grandmother in Pakistan, the one she had talked with me about, the grandmother she had slept with sometimes during her visit there last spring. I told Fareda I was very sorry to hear about that, and she said her father was very sad. (Field notes, April 23, 2004)

As Fareda told me this news, almost immediately after I met her in the classroom that day, I realized how incredible it was that we had not seen each other since the fall of 2003, and yet somehow we immediately fell back into that space where Fareda could share her stories with me, the really important ones like this one about her grandmother's death. I wondered if she had told anyone else at school about this.

When I read the story to Fareda, she listened intently, and did not comment or add things as she usually did. Afterwards, she asked me if we could have lunchtime book group days again. I explained that because I now live in a different province, I could not be at Ravine School as often anymore, and I could not have a lunch group. Fareda then asked me why I couldn't be a teacher and teach at Ravine School (Transcript, April 23, 2004, p. 11). Although I had not yet said so, it seemed that Fareda sensed today might be the last time we would be together for a while. I was feeling sad about this, and Fareda seemed to be too. It was not easy to come to this part of our research relationship. We had been seeing each other for nearly two years. There is no right thing to say, perhaps, in this situation, but I was very aware that my responsibility to Fareda continued on as I wrote my research text and kept learning through my telling and retelling of stories of my moments with her.

Endnote: "Now we're building a new house in Pakistan, but it's going to be way bigger…Or my dad will just change his mind and we'll just stay in Canada. I hope we stay" (Transcript, November 20, 2003, p. 8.).

Chapter 6: James: Imagining a Story to Live By

Coming To Know James in Grade 1

> When James arrived in Laura's class the first day of school, I recognized him right away as Nicole's brother. Nicole, with long red hair and a deep, husky voice, had been in Laura's room last spring when I spent some time there. James had the same bright hair colour and the same big smile. It was quickly apparent that Laura knew a story of James that continued over from her knowing of the family when Nicole was in her class. Nicole was, in Laura's words, a very nice girl, but one with learning difficulties. She had been tested last year and was going into a learning strategies classroom this year, a class developed especially for children with learning disabilities. Nicole's mother, Sarah Jane, had researched the topic of learning disabilities, Laura told me, and had decided that she wanted Nicole placed in this environment, as she believed it would benefit her. (Field notes, September 3, 2002)

When James came into the classroom as a 6-year-old Grade 1 student, there was already some thought that he would be tested too. The school board did not test children in Kindergarten, but Laura said his mother wanted him tested this year for sure. I wondered what it meant to be earmarked for testing before your first day of Grade 1.

> On the first day of school, some of the children were anxious, especially the Grade 1s. James, however, appeared quite relaxed and happy to be there. After Laura read a book about a frog starting school, she said she had been nervous this morning, before school started. She asked the children gathered on the carpet

> meeting area if any of them were nervous. Eli, the boy who had cried when his mother left, said he was nervous. James smiled broadly at Laura and said, "Not me, I already knew you!" He had been to this classroom often with his mother to pick up his sister. (Field notes, September 3, 2002)

I looked at James that first day of school and saw his smiling confidence. He seemed very pleasant and outgoing, eager to experience this new year in Grade 1, and to be a part of the Grade 1/2 classroom in which his sister had lived and worked and played for the past two years.

> A few days later James brought an Eyewitness non-fiction book over to my table at the back of the room at free reading time and wanted to read it with me. He was so interested in the sharks, the pages on electricity, the chemical reactions section; he seemed so open to trying to understand how these varied aspects of his world all worked. (Field notes, September 12, 2004)

James was busily making sense of his world, explaining to me how electricity travelled through wires, how sharks found their prey by smell, how chemicals shown in the photographs combined to make an entirely different substance. James brought much enthusiasm to his explanations, making use of his quite extensive vocabulary.

There were, however, other sides to James's first days in the classroom. James sometimes took a lot of time to get his indoor shoes on after recess and didn't get to his seat for a long time. His mother came in and brought him some sandals that were easier to fasten, after a few days (Field notes, September 25, 2002). James had a hard time sitting in his seat at his desk, and often his chair would fall over. He would quietly pick it up and try again. On the carpet meeting area, when all the children were sitting close to Laura to hear a book or to do the calendar and weather, James would sometimes be lying down apart from the group, not appearing to listen to what was going on. And when it was time to write or draw, James seemed unable to get much down on the paper. He found it very difficult to copy even one word from the whiteboard at the front of the classroom. These differences caused Laura to be concerned about him, and to discuss her concerns with Sarah Jane, James's mother. In spite of his good nature and his avid interest in the world around him, school was not always smooth sailing for James.

James had a vulnerability about him, which showed up at times when he was not quite able to cope with the challenges he faced.

> In late September 2002, the children were enjoying a free playtime just before lunch, an opportunity to play and work without an agenda. James was working diligently at making a train track out of blocks for about 15 minutes, when Tim accidentally stepped on the track, necessitating some repair work. James was slightly tearful at this. Then several children who were also building a structure wanted more blocks, so he was faced with a block shortage, and he began to cry in earnest. Laura said that he and the others needed to find a way to work out the block problem or to go on to something else. (Field notes, September 26, 2002)

Laura's response made sense and is similar to what I might have said if I was the busy teacher. But I wasn't the teacher, so I watched as the other children went on to do something else, and James stood alone on the carpet, crying. I wondered about what teachers like me teach in classrooms, and whether compassion makes it into the curriculum as much as it might. I also began to realize that James, with his intense personality, felt hurts like this one deeply and found it hard to shrug them off. I went to James and helped him straighten the train track.

Another aspect of James's story to live by that was becoming visible to me was his sense of humour. He often said witty, but divergent things.

> One of the children threw a barely eaten granola bar into the garbage, and Laura noticed it and told the children that we shouldn't waste food. She said it would be better to put the granola bar back in your lunch bag if you can't eat it, so your parents would know that you had too much food in your lunch today. She talked about how granola bars cost money, and we don't want our parents' money to be wasted. "Money doesn't grow on trees, does it?" Laura remarked. James spoke up: "Actually, money kind of does grow on trees, because money is made of paper, and paper comes from trees." (Field notes, September 25, 2002)

Another day in September 2002, Laura was starting a printing lesson. She drew several uppercase Os on the whiteboard too close together, and asked, "What's wrong with these?" James turned to me and said, "If you make them too close together, they look like magic rings stuck together" (Field notes, September 16, 2002). This was not maybe quite the answer Laura was looking for ("You can't read them clearly" is the right answer), but it showed James was attending, and he understood that he should not make his letters too close together.

James's intelligence and curiosity, as well as his friendliness and humour, were strengths he brought to school every day that I was in his classroom. He also brought less physical coordination than some children and some difficulties with drawing and writing, as well as a strong sense of caring for others, as the following section illustrates.

James Cares for Others

> James, Julie, and Charlene read a book with me called *The Way I Feel* (Cain, 2000) this morning. On each page there were different illustrations and some words about different emotions. On the sad page, Charlene told us about her mother leaving their family and how sad she was about this. This was a powerful moment and I was unsure about what to say. James was the one who stepped in and talked about how he felt sad when his pet hamster died, making a connection with Charlene's sadness.
>
> A few pages later, there was a page about feeling frustrated, and a picture of a girl trying to tie her shoelaces. James said that he would help that girl tie her laces. This was despite the fact that he has a tough time tying his own laces. His mom brought in sandals for him to wear, because of this issue. James felt sorry for the girl in the book, perhaps because he understood what it was to feel frustrated. (Field notes, October 15, 2002)

James was able to put himself in the shoes of others, I could see, as we read this book together, and to imagine how they might be feeling. His empathetic responses seemed thoughtful and mature, and I wondered how this aspect of James's story to live by sat alongside his awareness of the talk of having him tested for learning difficulties.

> The next day, James and Jacob came in late from recess, and I watched Laura go to the door to speak to them. I assumed they were being scolded. But at lunchtime, Laura told me they were helping a kindergartner who had fallen down on the playground. They took the child in to the Kindergarten classroom. Laura told them they had done a good thing in helping the younger child. (Field notes, October 16, 2002)

This was another example of James understanding that another child needed help. He and a friend chose to comfort a younger child who had fallen, knowing they would be late coming in for recess. This seemed to me a thoughtful and caring decision.

James Likes Scary Stories

In mid-November 2002, I asked each of the four children in the lunchtime group if I could scribe a story for them. James's choice of subject matter for his scribed story was scary and rather gory, a choice that I knew, as I was scribing, would fall outside the school story of what is acceptable to write about in Grade 1.

> James and I went into Miss Green's office and sat on cushions on the floor. I had pencil and paper ready, and asked James if he would like to tell me a story, and have me write it down for him. James smiled and began to tell me a "scary story" about digging in the playground and finding a human hand. I tried to move him away from the scary story idea, and we talked about some other possibilities (which I suggested). James politely discussed the other ideas I had, but then came back to his original idea and continued to tell about the monster he conquered,

> when everyone else was scared and ran home. He ended the story by saying that he was alone on the playground and he was lonely. He asked if we could read his story to the class. (Field notes, November 14, 2002)

I asked Miss Green about reading the story to the class, but she read it herself and did not think this would be appropriate. Scribing this story for James made me think about the way he storied himself as the hero who conquered the monster in the playground. I wondered if James (who was, by this time, definitely struggling with writing and other tasks in the classroom) might be imagining himself as a hero to counteract the self-doubt that his difficulties in the classroom may have been causing. I also noticed the ending left him alone on the playground, and lonely. Was that how James saw himself?

In May 2003, when I returned to the school after several months away, James and I spent some time together as I shared with him some of the writing I had begun based on the moments we shared over the fall of 2002.

> He told me he has been reading *Goosebumps* (Stine, 1997) chapter books, which are generally thriller-type stories, with gruesome and gory elements. I asked James if he remembered telling me the story of the ghostly hand in the playground, back in November 2002. He smiled and very animatedly retold part of that story. James mentioned that he had got a new lamp for his birthday in May, so he could read in bed. Laura later told me that James is a very good reader, the strongest in his Grade 1 group. (Field notes, May 8, 2003)

I could see a connection between the interest James had in telling me a scary story in November and his current delight in the *Goosebumps* (Stine, 1997) series. This was a genre James enjoyed, it seemed. I was intrigued by how well James remembered the story he had told me months before. I asked him if he still had the scribed story, and he said yes, it was in his desk.

James's Ideas Around Books We Shared at Lunchtime

During the lunchtime group conversations, James was sometimes quiet and often agreed with Bob, who was a year older. Sometimes he would extend Bob's ideas, as when we read *Everybody Needs a Rock* (Baylor, 1974), and Bob said he would get rich collecting and selling asteroids. James liked this idea.

> James: I'm going to be a billionaire too. Oh, and a rocket scientist. And then I'm going to catch a star. I would go 85,000 places to find a good rock. (Transcript, November 7, 2002, p. 36)

A little later, James was still thinking about billions, and about number concepts.

> James: Inside myself, I have billions and billions of wires. Oh, did you know that 1,563 times zero is zero? (Transcript, November 7, 2002, p. 37)

I read the book *Everybody Needs a Rock* (Baylor, 1974) many times, with many children, but this was a new way of thinking about the book for me. Putting an emphasis on the numerical was not something I had considered. James chose to draw on that thread in his connection to the book, and to use it to tell some of his own stories. James helped me see that book with fresh eyes, as he found his own links with it.

A couple of weeks later, I read *A Quiet Place* (Wood, 2002) with the lunchtime group, in the reading corner of Miss Green's classroom at lunch. James and Bob

> both really enjoyed this book, with each page vividly illustrating a landscape such as the seashore, the woods, or a mountaintop, a place where one might go to find quiet and solitude. Bob and James came to life as they looked at the scenes in this book. These two seem to have such a strong knowledge of and interest in physical geography, animals, and in general knowledge. They had lots to say about the landscape of each quiet scene. (Field notes, November 21, 2002)

James, in particular, was able to place himself in the scene on each page, creating a fiction about what he was doing on that landscape. This was something I saw more and more as I spent time reading with James.

> As we paused on the ocean page, James said, "I love the beach. At the beach, I would go surfing. But it's very, very, very dangerous, because a mudslide could come down. I could surf a hundred waves…no, 8,063 waves…that's a record breaker!" (Transcript, November 21, p. 29)

James's excited response to this page of the book made me think about how much I was learning from him, and from each of the children in the lunchtime group, by sharing books with him, not saying too much myself, but making that space for him to tell his own stories as we sat side by side. I was learning about his current interest in things numerical, his wonderful imagination, his knowledge of physical geography, and his ability to place himself within the pages of a book like this one. What more might I discover as we turned the pages together? This was one of the most thrilling moments of the lunchtime book group for me, as I realized the possibilities of what we were doing.

> On the page about the desert being a quiet place, James was intrigued by the cactus. “In the desert, they (the cactus) have spikes, to protect them from other critters.” Immediately, Bob pretended to be a cactus and James pretended to try to eat him. “Now I’m pretending to eat him. But spikes, watch out!” Bob (Putting out his fingers like spikes), said, “Try to eat me now!” James explained, “Well, they make them so spiky that sometimes critters in the desert just pop their spikes like really far out. Because there are pigs in the desert that are very furry and they, and they just break the cactus, or kill the cactus.” I asked what the animals wanted inside the cactus, and James replied, “Water.” He then looked at the illustration and said, “Oh, and the evening stars…some deserts don’t look like that. Some of them look all dark.” (Transcript, November 21, 2002, p. 30–31, Field notes, November 21, 2002)

The way James and Bob enacted this scene made me think about how embodied their knowing of the desert was, and how they needed this kind of space to show what they knew. James’s comment about the evening sky revealed how closely he attended to details in the texts he explored. Holding thoughts of his eye for detail in my mind, I found it strange to contrast this and the other skills James used in our lunchtime group conversations with the school story of James as needing to be tested and somehow “fixed.”

A Relationship of Trust

When James and I met in May 2003, I shared with him a bit of the writing I had been doing about him in our lunchtime book conversations and in other parts of the school day. I read him the first paragraph, about reading a book, *The Way Science Works* (2002), with me, and discussing the page about how sharks find their prey by smell. James stopped me to ask, "Did I actually tell you that, or did you just make it up?" (Transcript, May 8, 2003, p. 12). I was excited that he was questioning me on this level. There are those who might say that reading this writing to a child of six is not useful, not appropriate. But there James was, attending so thoughtfully to my words, and asking me a key question about the research methods I was using. When I told him about how I wrote down what he said that day back in September 2002, and how he had really liked the book we shared, he nodded thoughtfully and said, "Yeah, I did. I forget if I really did. But I bet I did" (Transcript, May 8, 2003, p. 13).

James seemed willing to trust my memory of this event, even though he could not recall it himself. This is a place where I realized that the ethics of our relationship, the ways that we trusted each other to act and write in ways that would help one another, were so important. James trusted I was writing accurately about him, whether he could remember the event himself or not. I was, and am, humbled by that trust. And I wanted to live up to that trust, so I struggled to find words that made sense for him as I wrote.

As I read a bit further in my words to James that day, one sentence said, "James is also funny and says witty, divergent things." James waited until I reach the end, and then told me that he didn't really understand some parts. He pointed to that line, and asked me what divergent meant. I tried to explain that it means thinking differently than others, in an interesting and clever way. I referred to the example of James saying that money really does grow on trees, because it is made of paper. He seemed to think this made sense, “Oh, that was a good idea then, to say that” (Transcript, May 8, 2003, p. 17). James made me realize how carefully I needed to choose my words if I wanted to include him in a conversation about my writing about him.

Awake to Possibilities

I brought a non-fiction book about medieval castles (Day, 2001) to read with James when I came to Ravine School in May 2003, and right away he provided another example of his divergent thinking, as we looked at the cover. James asked me if there were still dragons in medieval times, and I admitted that I was not sure if dragons ever existed. James informed me, “Actually, there were dragons. Komodo dragons. They’re reptiles” (Transcript, May 8, 2003, p. 19). I dimly recalled this fact from one of my son’s books, and agreed that yes, indeed, there are Komodo dragons, in Australia. James was happy once again to jump into the misty area between fact and fiction. “So, they might, in stories they might have made Komodo dragons fire-breathing ones. A hundred feet tall. Sometimes there was a part of their tail at the very bottom that had no skin, and to defeat the dragon, they just needed to bite it, that part there, or just cut it off” (Transcript, May 8, 2003, p. 19–20). James seemed to live so enthusiastically in that space between what is and what might be. I hope I learned a little bit from him about how to venture more freely into that space, to be awake to divergent possibilities.

In the castle book, James noticed things I would never notice. One page shows a cross-section of the inside of a castle, with each of the rooms and the stairs running counter-clockwise up the sides of the structure. Inside what appears to be a princess's bedroom, there is a bathtub. As James studied this picture, he noticed a detail and expanded on it. "Mmm, they must have invented pipes. They must have already had things in pipes. See those pipes right there?" (Transcripts, May 8, 2003, p. 22). There were indeed pipes descending from the bathtub down to the bottom of the castle.

James's ability to notice and study small details like this was one of the ways that he seemed to me to be so open to learning, a passionate and enthusiastic student.

Tension # 1: Seeing Big, Seeing Small

I was excited about the moments that I shared with James reading and talking about books. I could see such promise in the ways James's mind worked, his creative and divergent thinking. These moments, sometimes during Stations, a part of the morning classroom activities, or in the lunchtime book group with the other three children, or later, when just the two of us were reading together, were fragile creations. As soon as we left the small space we shared, James was back in a very different space, a space where he struggled as a student. He was storied as needing to be tested and remediated by the school story created for him. I was beginning to see James big in the way that Greene (1995) writes of, as I spent time attending to him in small groups, and writing about him afterward. "To see…people big, one must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening"

(p. 10). This is what I attempted in my relationship with James. I could see the particular (and amazing) gifts he brought to school and to his life. In the busy classroom, it was hard to see him big, and so no one noticed how his gifts of being observant, of imagination and thoughtfulness, of divergent and creative thinking, might be used to help James succeed in school. Neither James nor I were able to shift the school story of him over the course of the school year. And so James was medicated, given a battery of tests, and placed on the class list of the learning strategies classroom for the 2003–2004 school year.

Tensions of several sorts arose for me. Why was I not better able to advocate for James, to help his teacher and others see what I saw? Why did the school not see things differently? What would happen to James in this new setting, the learning strategies classroom? What would happen to his stories to live by? I wanted to help him, to stand beside him as he faced this new challenge, but I would not be here. I would visit several more times, but I would not be a steady presence in his life in the 2003–2004 year. Who was I in James's story?

James's Stories of Himself

The next time I talked with James was the last month of school, June 2003. As I read several pages of my writing about James to him, our conversation between the lines led us into some interesting places and gave me a glimmer of hope that he would be able to negotiate the changes ahead next year in Grade 2. I had just read a paragraph about how James knew what to say when Charlene talked about her mother leaving the family.

He talked about his pet dying, and how sad it was. He made a strong connection to the emotional tone of Charlene's words, and I wrote that I see James as a caring person who really listens to others and responds. As we talked on this day, I began to see James responding to my stories of him with statements that seemed to me to be a sharing of his story to live by. Were my retellings of small moments in his life at school a way for him to imagine himself in new ways?

I Can Protect Myself

I had recorded the story of James's response to Charlene in my field notes, but not on tape, and I had an important fact wrong.

> I had written that James's pet had been a hamster, but as I read this, James told me that it was actually his pet cat that had died. James told me more about how the vet had to give his cat, Taco Bell, a needle to end her life. The cat's death was not recent, it seemed. "I don't have that much memories of her." (Transcript, June 11, 2003, p. 4)
>
> James mentioned that he would like to have some kittens. He talked about how kittens are kept safe by their parents. "Their mothers and fathers protect the kittens…they can't protect theirselves" (Transcript, June 11, 2003, p. 4). James then went on: "I can protect myself. I'd need a torch or a sword or a gun" (p. 5). When I asked him from whom he needed to protect himself, James said, "Bad people. Or wild animals" (p. 5). He talked in the next breath about the safety rules

he knows for crossing the street and for biking and skateboarding. (Field notes, June 11, 2003)

James seemed to tell a story of himself as self-reliant and capable. He could protect himself. There was a quality of fictionalizing here, I was aware, as James imagined himself needing a sword or gun to protect himself. I was reminded of the story of James conquering the monster on the playground the previous fall. This ability to create fantastic stories with himself as the central character seemed to me to be a strength James possessed, one that helped him see himself as having some authority over his situation.

I'm Very, Very, Very Kind

I read another paragraph to James about how he and Justin had helped a child in Kindergarten at recess one day. The child had fallen down outside and they took him in to the Kindergarten teacher, which made them late returning to Room 7 after recess. James was quiet for a moment, then said slowly, "Yeah, I'm very, very, very kind" (Transcript, June 11, 2003, p. 7). I agreed with this, and James continued, "I think I learned that from a book…how to make people happy" (p. 7). I think about the importance of books in James's stories of himself, as sites where he can learn more about himself. Galda (1998) wrote of how literature provides windows into the experiences of others and mirrors into one's own experiences. I wonder if my writing about James sometimes provides him with mirrors and windows that help him consider his stories of who he is becoming.

I'm One of the Best Readers

The next piece I read to James was about how much he told me he enjoyed reading the *Goosebumps* books (Stine, 1997), earlier in the spring. He had received a new bed lamp for his birthday, and he used this to read nightly. Laura said to me in May 2003 that James is a strong reader, and this was in the paragraph I read to James. James picked up this story and went with it. "Yeah, I'm one of the best, I'm one of the best Grade 1 readers because I'm on *Magic Treehouse* and that's step books" (Transcript, June 11, 2003, p. 8).

Magic Treehouse books, such as *Day of the Dragon King* (Osborne, 1998), are a huge series of beginning chapter books in the adventure and mystery genres. James seemed to see himself as successful reader quite easily. I wondered how the frustrations he often encountered in the classroom with sitting still, behaving appropriately, and with pencil and paper tasks sat alongside James's story of himself as a good reader. He was able to hold onto this story of himself in the face of the difficulties he faced in school.

I'm Really Good at Math

Next came my retelling of a story from the previous fall, from one of our lunchtime book conversations. James made a drawing with Bob after we read *Everybody Needs a Rock* (Baylor, 1974). As they drew, they talked about how rich they would become by visiting stars and other planets and moons to collect rocks to bring back to Earth to sell. James talked about going to "eighty-five thousand places to find a good rock" (p. 10), and then he mentioned making billions and billions of dollars. He asked me, "Oh, do you know that 1,563 times zero equals zero?" When I read this to James on this June day, nine months later, he responded, "I'm really good at math" (Transcript, June 11, 2003, p. 10).

Again his words helped me reflect on the way that James shifts his stories of himself, and how the conversations we share may encourage him to imagine new stories for himself. Has James's story of himself as good at both reading and math been shaped even slightly by our relationship, by the writing I read to him, by the books we read, and by the conversations we have? Did talking about some of the stories I retold about him in relation with others mean that James was beginning to see himself as capable of protecting himself and as kind to others?

James Enters Into the Literature We Read

I read *A Quiet Place* (Wood, 2002) to the lunchtime group in the fall of 2002. One piece of writing I read to James was about his excited response to the page that showed a beach scene, with big waves breaking on the shore. Back in November 2002, James said, "At the beach I would go surfing but it's very, very dangerous…I could surf a hundred waves, no, 8,063 waves. That's a record breaker" (Transcript, November 21, 2002, p. 29).

On this sunny day in June 2003, James picked up on this idea that spun out from my retelling of our reading of *A Quiet Place* (Wood, 2002), and began to tell a story of how he surfed at the beach and saw dolphins and a whale. "A big black one. I jumped off my surfboard and went onto it. It took me back to the shore…I thought it could talk, but that was when I was younger…I was four years old. I'll show you what I was doing" (Transcript, June 11, 2003, p. 12–13). James got up and stood swaying as if he was trying to stand on a whale. "I thought I would fall off but then I got up and I was like this. I was hanging ten!" (Transcript, June 11, 2003, p. 13).

Here James entered even more fully into the text of that book, imagining himself on the back of a whale, riding the waves. Even in this fantasy, James was careful with details. He informed me that it was reasonable for him to think that the whale could talk, as he was only four years old at the time of this event.

Another page in *A Quiet Place* (Wood, 2002) has a detailed illustration of a desert landscape. I read my writing to James about how he talked with Bob about how the "spikes" on the cactus were a form of protection for that plant. They even acted out a short scene last November (2002) with James as the cactus and Bob as an animal trying to eat it. James immediately began to spin a story from this paragraph, which he seemed to use as a prompt. "And I've been to the desert and I had to use my knife to open a cactus to get my water. I had to fill my...what are those things cowboys use?" (Transcripts, June 11, 2003, p. 14). I suggested a canteen, and James continued. "Yeah, and I was riding my horse, and I found a little ghost town...we had some showdowns there." James went on to tell me about how cowboys need to have lassos as well as guns, because "they can't shoot when they're on a horse, because they need to hold on. They need to use lassos to catch the bulls" (Transcript, June 11, 2003, p. 14).

I was impressed once again with the way James was able to bring in the many things that he knew about the topic at hand (in this case, the desert and cowboy lore) and began to fictionalize a story for himself around it.

Tension # 2: The Borderlands Between Fantasy and Reality

I was as delighted as James to enter into fantastic worlds he created where he could ride whales, become a cowboy, or conquer monsters on the playground. The ability to insert himself into the stories or illustrations of books we read and to create his own fictions was something I saw as one of James's great strengths. Yet this gift of James's did not seem to be particularly noticed or encouraged in his classroom, and I began to wonder if perhaps I should be helping James think quite directly about ways he could shine during in-class activities. I believed then, and I still believe, that James's imagination is an important way that he learns about the world around him and something to be celebrated. However, I was aware of the tension between what I was able to see in small group and one-on-one conversations with James and the expectations of the larger setting of the Grade 1/2 classroom. Different things were valued in those differing contexts. I am tempted now, remembering this tension, to wonder about the effects of schooling in large classroom groups, about what may be lost for each child. However, keeping James's serious freckled face in my mind's eye, I decide instead to focus on the possibility that our conversations may have given him a little something to hold onto when he

bumped against those classroom expectations, a small memory of a moment when we talked about riding on whales and no one said it was silly or untrue.

> I read *Weslandia* (Fleischman, 1999) with James later that morning, a book about a boy named Wesley who creates his own world based on some special seeds that blow into his garden and start to grow in the midst of a society that places great value on conformity. James paused at the part where Wesley developed mosquito repellent by crushing the plant's seeds with a mortar and pestle. Wesley sold the oil at ten dollars a bottle, the book told us. James told me how he disliked getting mosquitoes in his hair and around his eyes. I shared an incident that happened to me last summer, when a mosquito flew into my mouth and I accidentally swallowed it. James laughed and said, "You were eating some of the Amazon food!" He then told me that the people of the Amazon eat snakes and insects.
>
> (Field notes, June 11, 2003)

I wondered where that piece of information came from. James seemed ~~to~~ have an amazing depth of knowledge about a wide variety of topics. Even when I am not sure if it is entirely accurate, as in this case, I found James's ability to connect to the books we read, through things he knows already, quite wonderful. He seemed to use this knowledge as a springboard to launch himself into stories, as in our conversation about *A Quiet Place* (Wood, 2002).

A Letter to James

In the fall of 2003, a year after I had begun to know James and his Grade 1/2 class, I wrote a letter to James and to each of the children in the lunchtime book group. I spent a long time thinking about James, full of questions about things we had talked about and things I thought about later, as I read and reread my field texts. The letter I wrote to James follows. I had the opportunity to read this letter to James on a trip back to Ravine School in November 2003.

October 10, 2003

Dear James,

Sometimes I get the feeling you are drawn toward the borderline between fantasy and reality. Remember that story you told me about finding the ghostly hand in the sandbox on the playground, when I was here in the fall last year? Yes, you retold it to me in the spring of 2003, in detail. You also told me that you woke the dead once and a mummy came out of your floor. I wondered about this and you explained: "I was running around really fast and I wasn't paying attention and I was making so much noise that I woke the dead" (Transcript, May 8, 2003, p. 3). When I looked surprised, you let me in on a secret, "That was just a story. It wouldn't really happen," you told me reassuringly. James, you help me think about how sometimes we fictionalize parts of our lives. I wonder why you occasionally pretend a bit of a scary story for yourself.

Your choice of pseudonym, the name you decided on today, suits you well, James. As well as being a name you like, it is also the first name of a character you admire, *James Bond, the spy. You remember that Bob called you "double oh seven," when you were playing spies at recess, and you liked that. James Bond gets involved in some pretty scary stories, doesn't he?*

I know you like stories with "ghosts and monsters and zombies and vampires and any other kind of scary things" (Transcript, May 8, 2003, p. 4). Your favourite books last spring were Goosebumps *(Stine, 1997) chapter books, and you read them at bedtime with your new lamp that you got for your birthday. Your teacher says you are one of the strongest readers in the class. I wonder what stories you will tell and read this year in the learning strategies classroom. Will there be spaces to talk about the ghosts and trolls and serpents in the Harry Potter books (Rowling, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000)? Will you find a friend to discuss the differences between Godzilla and King Kong with you? Sometimes you and Bob talk about characters from books and movies like this, but Bob will not be in your class next year. I think about the ending of your "ghostly hand in the sandbox" story, where you were alone on the playground and you were lonely. What kinds of stories are you thinking of now? [Are you lonely in school sometimes, James? I want to ask you that, and I want to hear that you are ok, that being in the learning strategies classroom is working out for you.*]*

When you and I had a few moments together last May, we read an interesting book about medieval castles. The things you noticed about the castle in that book were interesting, and I thought later about how I would never have noticed them if you had not pointed them out, things like the knights who may have been heading out to fight dragons, *and the way the pipes worked in the castle. You are so observant, James, and I learn much from talking with you. What sorts of things are you interested in now, I wonder.*

Thank you for the books and talks we have shared, James. You have helped me learn new things. It has been a gift working and playing with you.

Love, Anne

* I did not read this part aloud to James when I read him the letter, but it was surely in my thoughts as I travelled to Ravine School for conversations with James (and the other children from the lunchtime book group) in the fall of 2003, when he was placed in the learning strategies classroom for Grade 2.

James was quite quiet when I went to his learning strategies classroom to ask him if he would like to come and read with me on the morning of November 25, 2003. Both Laura and Jeanette mentioned to me that James did not seem very happy this year, but it was still a surprise to see him so muted. I wondered if he wanted to be there with me or not (Field notes, November 25, 2003). With some nervousness, I began to read my letter to James in the library at Ravine School, over in a corner where I had often sat with groups of children from Laura's classroom the year before. As I read the early part of the letter, and mummies were mentioned, James's eyes scanned the bookshelves behind us and he cried, "Look, there's a mummy book!" (Transcript, November 25, 2003, p. 1).

> We took the book, *Secrets of the Mummies* (Griffey, 1998), from the shelf and spent the next 10 minutes reading it. James really knew a lot about mummies. He talked about the curses written on the coffins in hieroglyphics, and as I scanned

> the text, the book said the same thing. As we looked at the illustrations, James told me several other intriguing facts. He said he had learned about mummies on the Discovery channel. He was clearly enjoying this. (Field notes, November 25, 2003)

I was thrilled to see this return to the kind of relationship we had the year before, one where we could sit with a book between us, traveling between the lines far and away.

> When we eventually returned to reading the letter, James listened attentively and responded carefully. He told me all the boys in his class were his friends (there were no girls in that learning strategies class), and when I asked if any were his special friends, he said no. I wonder what will happen to James over the next year or two. He seems so gentle and vulnerable. (Field notes, November 25, 2003)

The lively conversation we had about mummies reminded me of how much James knew about the world around him; his knowledge was detailed and sophisticated. Wouldn't that be a way to connect with him as a learner in school? Yet I knew from conversations with Jeanette and Laura (Field notes, November 25, 2003) that James was experiencing little success in school.

> Jeanette said James appeared to be a non-reader and a non-writer in school this year, as we sat in her office and talked about the children I had worked with in the lunchtime book group. I talked with her about the stories of himself as a reader and a writer that James had told me in the spring of 2003. Jeanette told me that she and James's current teacher had talked about trying to keep that self-image

> alive for him. “If he can hold onto that image…” she said wistfully, with her hands slightly outstretched. (Field notes, November 25, 2003)

Like Jeanette, my wish for James is that his story to live by stays strong and alive for him, his stories of himself as a good reader and good at math, but also his stories of himself as powerful, able to protect himself, and very kind. As my trips back to Ravine School became less frequent over the 2003–2004 school year, I was faced with the knowledge that our research relationship was changing and I was seeing James (and the other children) less often. I would not be able to stay alongside James in the way I wanted to, as he went through this difficult time. I felt that I was not living up to the trust James had placed in me, and this troubled me. At the same time, I was glad the principal, Jeanette, shared my concerns for James and would be there with him when he needed support.

Tension # 3: Coming Toward the End of My Time at Ravine School

My concerns for James were magnified by the distance between us once I left the western Canadian city where he attended Ravine School and started to work at a small university in eastern Canada. At first, during the winter and spring of 2003, I was able to travel back to Ravine School and stay for longer periods, but in the 2003–2004 school year, I was there only twice, and for shorter times. I knew that James was having a hard time, and I wanted so much to be able to help and support him, yet I was not there very much. I realized that Jeanette and other people at the school and in his life were making efforts to encourage James, and I do not at all

mean to diminish their support of him. I was troubled by the way that I had begun a research relationship with James (and the other three children) and yet I was not there to sustain it, especially over the difficult year James was experiencing.

I began to see new sides to the complexities of the research relationship. Particularly in work with young children like these, how could I live up to the trust that James and the others placed in me, as their friend, as I came to the school less and less often? Neither James nor any of the other children ever told me they were disappointed in me, or gave any indication that they felt let down by me, although they did talk of missing me. Still I felt a tension around this gradually increasing distance between visits, and the approach of a time when I would no longer come to Ravine School at all. How should I live with this tension? How could I stay with it and learn from it? These questions continued to occupy a corner of my mind as I sat down to write my final piece for James, a piece of fiction with him as the central character.

Writing a Fictional Piece for James

James often wore a *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000) shirt during his year in Grade 1, a colourful one with a big mountain troll on the front. Being a big *Harry Potter* fan, James had seen the movies several times. He read the first two books himself in his Grade 2 year, and talked with me about various scenes from the books. In the field texts I collected over the year, Harry Potter and the other characters were mentioned frequently by James (Field notes, December 5, 2002, Jun 11, 2003, November 25, 2003).

In keeping with the magical ways of the *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000) books, images in the paintings that hang throughout Hogwarts Castle are able to travel around freely. They move not only within the confines of their own picture, but also from one painting to another, whether that painting is across the room or in another city. Often Harry and his friends find that the large woman whose painting guards their dormitory door has gone off to visit a friend and her frame sat temporarily empty. I adapted this idea of moving among pictures for the following story about James.

In this fictional piece, James is able to move from one picture to another, just like the characters in the paintings in the *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000) books. As James moves from picture frame to picture frame, he enters into moments of his life in each time and place. All of the moments are based on ones that he imagined during our conversations (as recorded in the field texts), although they contain fragments that I observed on the school landscape as well. I chose this form for James because he placed himself so readily in the midst of stories in books we read. He was quick to imagine himself as a character in many of the books we read. I hope this form honours the multiple versions of himself that James moves among, the imagination he brings to creating his own stories to live by.

James's Amazing Adventures

The First Picture

In the great hall of the castle, Sir James sat at the long table, which was groaning under the weight of many dishes laden with rich food. After a long day chasing a cunning dragon named Firenze, Sir James was glad to take off his shining armour and relax in the warmth of the fire at King Henry's castle. He was careful, however, to keep his sword, Magnificence, close to his side. Sir James hoped to play checkers later with Frederick, one of the noblemen seated at the table. The jester, Marvin, juggled fireballs and kept up a steady monologue of witty stories designed to amuse the king and his companions. Sir James smiled at the humorous tales Marvin spun, and looked around at the king, the beautiful Queen Isabella, and the 15 other noblemen and women seated at the table. Some were talking animatedly. Others listened with interest to one or more of the various conversations taking place around the table, while still others were intent upon their meal and spared little attention for anything else. All appeared to be enjoying the feast, and Sir James was quite sure all were oblivious to the danger that lurked just outside the castle walls. Sir James rose from the table to stretch, walked to the darkened doorway, stepped through, and was immediately plunged into darkness. A damp, earthy smell greeted his nostrils and a chill ran up his spine.

The Second Picture

"Professor, over this way," urged a woman's voice. The beam from a powerful flashlight shone on the ground in front of James's feet, and he recognized his travelling

companion and sister, Nicole. James was a foremost authority on ancient Egypt and was on yet another expedition to learn more about the mummification process used thousands of years ago. He was a professor at a large university in North America, and his sister often called him Professor, partly in jest but partly because she really was very proud of him. James and Nicole made their way cautiously across the earthen floor of the tomb, and came to a coffin on which were still clearly visible a series of hieroglyphics intended to frighten away any intruders. James scanned the symbols quickly, noting the various curses they signified for any who dared to open the coffin. He did not intend to touch this coffin; he had worked with many other mummies in his life, and he knew this one would not be exceptional. Nicole gasped as she turned to look at the facing wall. James spun around. Here was what he had come so far to see. Just as his painstaking research had predicted, here was a wall of solid gold, studded with many precious jewels. As he put out his hand to touch it, James felt a rush of air. He blinked. His outstretched hand was touching not a wall of gold, but a large round plastic tube.

The Third Picture

James looked up and watched two children slide down the red plastic slide on the playground at his school. It was a cold day and he pulled his jacket up around his neck more closely. James's favourite place to play on the playground was the sandpit over by the community centre, but it was too cold today. Besides, the ground was frozen and snow-covered. James thought about the story he had made last fall about the ghostly hand rising up out of the sandpit, and his daring deed, capturing the ghost and saving *everyone in the school. Maybe today he would imagine another story; he liked thinking about adventure stories in which he could be a hero, a knight in shining armour, or a famous explorer. James chewed his last carrot stick—he knew good healthy snacks were important; both his teacher and his mother had taught him that. James took a walk over to the other side of the school, being careful to hold out his arm as he crossed the parking lot, just as the crossing guards did. He was glad recess was almost over; it would be time for gym when he went back inside, and gym was one of his favourite subjects. As James opened the school door, he had the sensation that he was going up, up, up...*

The Fourth Picture

James felt water splashing up in his face, and he was balancing carefully as, below him, huge waves pitched and fell. James squinted in the bright sun. He was surfing, far out from the shore of a beautiful sandy beach, riding the waves with grace and ease. James was an expert surfer and could ride wave after wave. Once he had counted 163 waves that he had surfed, one after the other. As he looked to his left and right, James could see the sleek, shining black backs of several Orca whales. With a smile of satisfaction, James realized he was surfing amongst the pod, as he had done on several other occasions. He was so close to one whale that he could reach out his hand and touch it. James felt almost as though he could talk with the whales as he slipped through the water alongside them. What a feeling of joy! Finally, he came closer to the shore and his surfboard slowed. He jumped off and pulled the board to the beach. As he *walked up the beach, he felt the warm sand beneath his feet growing cool and hard. He was surrounded by tall green plants.*

The Fifth Picture

In the midst of the lush green jungle known as Weslandia (Fleischman, 1999), there sat James's friend Wesley, selling bottles of the famous mosquito repellent he had concocted from the juice of the amazing plant that had grown up overnight. James hated mosquitoes; they always got into his hair. He quickly dug into his pocket for some change to buy a bottle. Then he bent down to tie his shoe, and as he did, he noticed a small lizard crawling in the undergrowth. James reached out to pick it up. The scene suddenly faded and James could hear the sound of Queen Isabella's tinkling laughter inside the castle…

When I read this piece to James on April 23, 2004, he seemed to enjoy it very much, and he was quite specific in his comments about some additions and changes he would like me to make in the story. In the first picture, he said he would like to be outside the castle, near the dragon, and that he would like to walk out "a bridge that goes down like a door…but it doesn't have hinges, it uses chains, and it's very heavy, and you have to crank it up" (Transcript, April 23, 2004, p. 14). I suggested that we add a drawbridge and James readily agreed. James was not sure he wanted his sister, Nicole, in the second picture. "That's really my sister? She wouldn't know anything about the job. I would do a better job than her" (Transcript, April 23, 2004, p. 16). James told me that his sister did not think he was going to be a scientist. I asked him if *he* thought he would be, and he replied, "I know I am. I'm very smart. I know about how everything is made of molecules. Not a lot of kids know that" (Transcript, November 23, 2004).

I was especially glad to hear James' affirmation that he saw himself as "very smart" and that he had plans to become a scientist when he grew up. This was very heartening to me in the context of the difficult year James was having in school. In the face of the school story of James, he seemed to me brave and tenacious to be able to sustain this image. I hope James is able to carry this image of himself forward through the challenges of the next years of school.

> After the fourth picture about riding the whale, James told me some interesting facts about whales, and about how dangerous Orcas can be. After I read the fifth picture, and he heard the ending about hearing Queen Isabella's tinkling laugh, and returning to the castle of the first picture, James suggested a fuller ending. He said he could be outside the castle, feeding the dragon, and finding himself growing tired, thinking, "I wish I could stop going through all these pictures." Then he could slip into another picture and it's his real life, and he is a grown up, a space scientist who is eating space food out in space (Field notes, April 23, 2004).

I was awed by the experience of sharing this piece with James. James entered fully into this story, as he had so often done with books we read together, seeming to find glimpses of himself in each picture. He also added to the piece, by creating a new ending and other smaller changes. I felt that the connections James made with this piece were reflective of the ways our conversations together were mirrors and windows (Galda,

1998) for him over our time together. In our moments together, James had begun to look at himself, to hold gently and explore his stories to live by, and perhaps to see new possibilities as we read and talked together. James has taught me a great deal about the power of narrative inquiry.

Endnote: "I like mostly books with ghosts and monsters and zombies and vampires and any other kind of scary things" (James, Transcript, May 8, 2003, p. 4).

Chapter 7: Lingering in the Moments of Tension

Looking back across the chapters about each of the four children in the lunchtime book group, I see the tensions I highlighted, some stretched taut over whole sections, others surfacing from time to time, perhaps hidden for the most part. My thinking around narrative conceptualizations such as narrative coherence (Carr, 1986), as well as my understanding of ethics in relation with my participants, were stretched as I drew out these tensions, lingering in some of the moments in these children's lives without turning the page quickly and moving on to stories less complex and dilemma-filled. Staying with these moments of tension helped me begin to comprehend things I did not understand or of which I was not even aware before.

Interruptions In Stories To Live By

Each of the four children I worked, played, and talked with was engaged in creating his or her own story to live by. I came to see how Bob storied himself as smart, funny, and passionate about his interests in rocks, human anatomy, and favourite books such as the *Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1952–57/1999) trilogy. Julie talked about the importance of her mother and family in her life, and seemed to see herself as curious and full of wonders about the world around her. Her ability to hold on to her ideas, her quiet determination, and her thoughtfulness were reflected in her words during our conversations. I saw Fareda brimming with stories about her life, both in Canada and in Pakistan, and marvelled at how she found a space in our conversations to explore her identity. She was very focused, sustaining an inquiry into her home places and what they meant to her over the length of our relationship. James struggled with school tasks, but I saw him imagining himself into most books we read, creating a story of himself as brave, adventurous, and intelligent.

Interestingly, all four children were storied as below-average students by the school, although the story was told in differing ways for each child. Quiet in class, scoring poorly on standardized tests and classroom-based measures of assessment, Fareda was regarded as a struggling student. Julie was placed in the group seen as needing special assistance to complete the standardized literacy tests mandated by the school board. Due in part to frequent lateness and absences, she was also seen as a struggling student. Bob was a candidate for special testing because there was a gap between his oral language and his written performance. James was also slated for testing from his first day in Grade 1, and was storied as having significant learning challenges.

As I saw each child busily making sense of who he or she was and who he or she was becoming, these were the other stories being told of him or her by the school. Amazing to me was how these school stories seemed different from the stories I was attending to with the children themselves. For example, the same day James told me about how much he enjoyed reading the first *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997) book, I was told that James was a non-reader. There seemed to be gaps between the children's telling of their stories to live by in their conversations with me and the ways I believed the school saw them. In the previous four chapters, I explored some of those gaps in detail.

I wonder, looking back across the stories of these four children, about the ways each child's composition of a story to live by was a search for narrative coherence, a process of "telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story about what we are about and what we are" (Carr, 1986, p. 97). As I spent time with Bob, Fareda, Julie, and James, I began to understand each of them as struggling to achieve a narrative coherence, shaped by their experiences, past and present, by their contexts and relationships. It is through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that I attended to each child's telling of a story to live by, as a story shaped by the temporal, the personal, the social, the relational, and the places each knew well. Attending in this way, I found myself wondering what happens, or what has already happened, when there is a lack of congruence between the school stories being told of a child and his or her own composition of a story to live by.

At first, and for a long time, when moments of tension became visible to me, such as the moment when Julie was not allowed to stay for lunch despite her best efforts (see chapter 4), I considered that a student might be resisting the ways she or he was being storied by school. I believed I saw this resistance in the ways that a child continued to tell me stories about herself or himself as smart, a good reader, or a child who could stay for lunch, despite the school's telling of a different story. As I narratively inquired into these moments, I began to wonder if each child with whom I was in conversation might be searching for a narrative coherence in their stories to live by (Huber, Huber, & Clandinin, 2004). Perhaps they were not so much resisting how they were being storied in school as endeavouring to sustain their identities through the tensions that arose, as they were storied as too quiet, learning disabled, or not smart. I began to see these tensions as creating potential interruptions in students' stories to live by. For some, the interruptions the school stories created caused the student to have to continually search for narrative coherence. On the other hand, some students did not seem to experience the school story as an interruption, not attending to that school story, perhaps because the gap between her or his story to live by and the way the school storied her or him was *so* great, they could not see themselves in the school story.

Bob saw himself as possibly becoming a doctor some day, like his grandfather, and amazed me with the creative and unusual ways he played with words and ideas. A school story of Bob was that he was not writing well, and needed to be tested and remediated. He was not seen as a strong student, and was storied as one who talked too much. Bob, like the other three children, did not talk directly with me about the ways this school story of him might be shaping his story to live by. However, in the second year of my time at Ravine School, he appeared to be working hard to maintain his story to live by, telling me, for example, about his knowledge of how the central nervous system of the body worked, and how our bodies fight off viruses. He emphasized he was very smart. I wonder if Bob was using his interest and knowledge in the human body, as well as his interest and knowledge in rocks and metal objects, to find narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) in his story to live by as a capable, intelligent person. Perhaps this was increasingly challenging in the face of the interruption provided by a school story that said he was not a knower, not a successful student.

Julie was storied by the school as a student who was working at a below-average level, at five and six years old. She was one of four students in the class permitted to write their literacy achievement tests with me, as I read the questions aloud to them (Field notes, May 1, 2003). In contrast, during our conversations together, I observed she seemed to be growing and blooming as an emergent reader and writer, as she responded to books we read with curiosity and enthusiasm, increasingly volunteering to read sections herself, and writing notes in my field notebook. Will the school story interrupt Julie's story to live by, convincing her she is not an able student?

If Julie was searching for narrative coherence in her story to live by (and I believe she, like all of us, was and is), then I imagined being storied as a marginally successful student at best might cause Julie to experience some tensions at some point. I had a sense that Julie's identity was composed of strong interwoven cultural and family threads that enabled her to continue to feel a narrative coherence throughout the 2002–2003 school year. I wondered if the ways the school storied Julie were *so* different from her story to live by that she did not even see herself as the one being storied.

However, in my last visit with Julie in May 2004, I sensed a shift, or the beginnings of a shift, as Julie no longer called her grandmother Gookum in conversation with me, and did not seem interested in telling stories of her life outside of school. She was quieter and I could not see the spark that had previously burned so bright, as she engaged with me in telling her stories. I felt something was missing in her manner with me, something I could not quite put my finger on. Had the way she was storied by the school caused Julie to begin to recompose her story to live by, as she struggled to find narrative coherence? Was the school story interrupting her story to live by, causing Julie to experience a tension? How would this tension reshape her story to live by, so that she could find again a sense of narrative coherence, perhaps telling a story of herself as unsuccessful in school?

As I came to know Fareda, I began to see she was creating a story to live by as she inquired into her move from Pakistan to Canada and her identity as a child with roots in both countries. Although Fareda, too, was storied as a below-average student by the school, I could see in our moments together that she was using books we read, her memories, and her imagination in exciting and creative ways, to make sense of her experiences. The school story of Fareda as quiet and with little to say seemed to cause Fareda to live that way on the in-classroom places of the school, in contrast to the talkative and engaged manner she expressed in my conversations with her.

In a search for narrative coherence, was Fareda composing a story to live by that included plotlines of silence in the classroom? Was it easier to live by that expectation than to bump against it? In relationship with Fareda, I knew her as a person with vivid stories of life in Pakistan and in Canada, and as one who was engaged in an inquiry into who she was and who she was becoming, as a daughter, a granddaughter, a friend, a sister and a student. I knew her story to live by included much more than a story of herself as the quiet student in class. In the time I spent with Fareda in lunchtime book group and in later conversations, she did not appear to experience tension, to feel a need to search for narrative coherence because of how she was storied in school. Perhaps this was because the gap was so wide between her story to live by and the way the school storied her that she could not see herself in the school story. I wonder whether Fareda will encounter moments of tension as her story to live by, with all its interwoven threads, continues to bump against the school story of Fareda as having only one thread, as a quiet, low-achieving student.

James was a child who had already been tested, medicated, and moved into a learning strategies classroom between Grade 1 and Grade 2. Even on the first day of school in Grade 1 (Field notes, September 3, 2002), James was storied as a struggling student. The interruption this school story created in James's story to live by seems undeniable to me. I saw changes in his behaviour, as he became quieter and more withdrawn during his year in Grade 2. Laura and Jeanette also told me about noticing these changes (Field notes, November 25, 2003). The lack of success he continued to experience in the move to the learning strategies classroom was, I suspect, obvious to him. He shared with me his knowledge that he was seen as having difficulties. "A part of my brain wasn't working for a while. Actually, it still might not be" (Transcript, November 25, 2003, p. 30).

James's use of imagination, creating stories for himself and plunging into books we read together, often making himself a central character, were how he seemed to be composing a narrative coherence for himself as a capable, knowledgeable, thoughtful person during our conversations. This narrative coherence was threatened by the way James was storied in the classroom, causing him to experience tensions, and to begin to shift his story to live by to include a brain that did not always work properly. In shifting his story to live by in this way, I wonder if James was able to achieve narrative coherence again. His withdrawn manner seemed to increase as he moved through Grade 2, causing me to question whether he has been able to achieve narrative coherence. Without a sense of narrative coherence, he may have been living with mounting tensions. According to Carr (1986), narrative coherence “seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense” (p. 97). Did things make sense for James as his story to live by was interrupted quite dramatically by the way he was storied in school?

The next layer I am drawn to in the narrative inquiry I am engaged in with the four students is my own narrative coherence and how some of the moments of tension I experienced as I sat alongside each of them perhaps interrupted that coherence. This caused me to search backward and forward through time, inward and outward through my story to live by and its meeting (and sometimes bumping) with those of the children and the school stories I was coming to know at Ravine Elementary School. One of the tensions I experienced was in relation with what it means to be a responsible researcher and adult in the lives of the four children.

Ethical Uncertainties: What Does it Mean to Be Responsible as a Researcher?

In many of the tensions I highlighted in the previous four chapters, the responsibilities I had and have as a researcher and a friend in the lives of these four children loomed large. Dewey (1938) charged educators with the responsibility to “institut[e] the conditions for the kind of present experience which has a favorable effect upon the future” (p. 50), taking into consideration the principles of continuity and interaction. I understood this to mean that I was and am responsible, in working as a researcher with the students of the lunchtime book group (and others in Laura’s Grade 1/2 class), to create, as fully as possible, situations that will encourage educative experiences in the present and will open possible pathways to educative experiences in the future. I took this responsibility seriously from the initial stages of my research. For example, I worked to find books that might create spaces for each child to tell and retell stories of their lives, searching for ways to be attentive to the directions each child's stories might lead us, so our conversations together would be educative not only for me, but also for Bob, James, Fareda, and Julie. I found my understanding of this responsibility became more complex and question-filled as time went by, and I began to know each child more fully. At times, I was unsure about what was the best thing to do, as tensions arose and stories to live by bumped against one another.

For Bakhtin (1981), responsibility in relation with others "comes about as the result of efforts by the self to shape meaning out of the encounter between them. What self is answerable to is the social environment; what self is answerable for is the authorship of its responses" (pp. 67–68). In being responsible to the children with whom I was engaged, I endeavoured to reflect upon our encounters over time, and in the context of the school and the wider social environment in which we live, that is, within the three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Has this been enough to enable me to author responses that, as Dewey (1938) said, have "a favorable effect upon the future" (p. 50) for each student, encouraging them to author their own stories, and to allow me to fulfill the call to be answerable to the social environment?

Noddings (1986) adds an important contribution as I consider my responsibility as a researcher. Noddings's discussion of the need for educational research guided by her conceptualization of an ethic of caring is central to my understanding of what it means to engage in research in schools. "Fidelity to persons counsels us to choose our problems in such a way that the knowledge gained will promote individual growth and maintain the caring community…Such research would be genuine research *for* teaching instead of simply research *on* teaching" (p. 506). In being alongside the four students from the lunchtime book group, I attempted to maintain a fidelity to each child, over time and across the situations in which we found ourselves. Sometimes this meant I felt a lack of clarity about what to do when moments of tension arose. I knew I wanted to support the child, as my ethic of caring guided me to do, but how best to provide support was not always clear to me.

Oyler (1996) uses a dance metaphor to illustrate how teachers attempting to share authority in their classrooms with their students are involved in delicate, ongoing negotiations, not abdicating their teacher authority, but working with students "to teach them the established dances, learn their new ones, and together with our mutual expertise create new dances the world has yet to see" (p.137). This idea of a negotiated dance links with my wonders about responsibility in my research. In my relationships with each child, was I a good dance partner, as my position shifted between *leading the dance*, as I chose what I hoped would be appropriate books for us to read and talk about, to *dancing with*, as we engaged in conversations about those books and about our lives, to *attending to* a dance unfolding, as a child opened her or his heart and told me pieces of her or his story to live by? I do not mean to imply that the dance followed these steps sequentially, but rather, that these parts of the dance were happening in any order, and usually more than one aspect of the dance was occurring during any given conversation. The multiple layers of meanings, the fluid nature of our conversations, are underscored by this metaphor of the dance. The question of my responsibility as researcher in this dance is similarly complex.

As I turn to the children in the following paragraphs, I lay these wonders around responsibility alongside my relationships with each one.

In reading books with Fareda, whose family had come to Canada from Pakistan recently, I came to realize the importance of the space I was creating alongside her and the other children in the group. Her excitement over *A Gift for Gita* (Gilmore, 1998) and her sense of expectancy whenever we read together after sharing that book helped me understand more about my responsibility to continue to collaboratively cultivate that space to read, listen, and learn with Fareda and her classmates. The tension, for me, was in trying to keep myself awake to this responsibility, not to let myself smooth over a child's words, but to allow those words to take us into spaces where we could talk of the stories that child wanted to share. Sometimes it was tempting, when I was tired or when time was limited, not to fully engage when, for example, Fareda began to tell of her loose tooth and her father's advice to pull it out with a string. I believed, and continue to believe, that my responsibility in a research relationship that values fidelity to persons (Noddings, 1986) is to attend to Fareda and to find ways to remain attentive, despite limitations of time and energy.

Fareda, along with Ricky and Felicia taught me about *dancing with*, as they encouraged me to find books and provide conversation space for us to talk about their memories and stories of life in India and Pakistan alongside their lives in Canada. These children did not openly say this was what they wanted. I had to learn to read it in their eyes and smiles and they ways they touched the pictures in our books (see chapter 5). Talking about books with characters that looked like them and shared dilemmas that were familiar to them, such as *A Gift for Gita* (Gilmore, 1998) and *Lights for Gita* (Gilmore, 1994), was perhaps a beginning in creating what Dewey (1938) called the "conditions for the kind of present experience which has a favorable effect upon the future" (p. 50). Did my choice of books to share with the children provide the conditions for the kind of experience that might lead to such a favorable effect? What might a favorable effect be in this situation? Might it mean that Fareda, Ricky, and Felicia would be inclined to continue to explore their own stories to live by, perhaps looking to children's literature for resonances, for ways to achieve narrative coherence? Perhaps I *led the dance* in that way, by bringing in books to share, but it was Fareda and the others who then reminded me to *dance with* them as they made sense of the books through personal connections with their own stories to live by.

Julie, too, helped me learn about *dancing with*, as she sometimes told stories that I did not understand right away, a dance I thought I did not recognize. When Julie began to talk about family stories (Field notes, June 10, 2003), I was not sure how to respond to the way she told the story of her 18-year-old auntie being kicked out of the house. In the moment I did not say much at all. In thinking about this story later, as I retold it in my writing, I began to see that another aspect of responsibility for me is to stay with a story like this one, to retell and reconsider, to stay with the tensions I uncover, to find my way into the dance alongside Julie. Although I was not able to respond quickly to Julie in this case, I tried to be awake to my responsibility to return to the story later, as I sat at my computer at home, searching for a new way of looking at it, a way that allowed me to see this story differently (see chapter 4). I began to write about how my own story of leaving home at the age of 18 to move to another community to attend university had some parallels with Julie's story of her auntie being kicked out. Perhaps I began to "world-travel" (Lugones, 1987, p. 3) to Julie's world, to try to understand her story by laying my own story alongside it, with what Lugones termed "loving perception" (p. 7). Lugones suggests to perceive with love requires "that I see with her eyes, that I go into [Julie's] world, that I see both of us as we are constructed in her world, that I witness her own sense of herself from within her world" (p. 8). Bakhtin's (1984) idea of what it means to be responsible in relation with others returned to me as I tried to "shape meaning out of the encounter between [us]" (p. 67–68), to author my response to Julie's story, albeit belatedly, in ways that contained possibilities for growth (Dewey, 1938). As I wrote of my own story of turning 18 and leaving home, I could imagine Julie's story of her auntie from a perspective of loving perception, one that enabled me to begin to travel into Julie's world. From my stance of fidelity to persons (Noddings, 1986), this is and was part of my responsibility as a researcher.

I wondered whether I was living a story of responsibility toward James, as he was tested, moved to a learning strategies classroom, and as he struggled with school. When I encouraged James to change the *ghostly hand* story I was scribing for him to something I knew would be more acceptable in the classroom, was I maintaining a fidelity to him, while trying to change him, to help him fit with the school story of acceptable topics for

Grade 1 writing? Similarly, when I asked Bob to change the word, NOTHING, his response to the question "What have you learned?" on his worksheet so he would not get into trouble, was I being responsible in the ways Dewey (1938), Bakhtin (1984), and Noddings (1986) help me understand that word? I could see both James and Bob bumping against the school story of a good student. While I applauded their uniqueness and the complex ways they used their imaginations, at the same time I realized that if they could just play along and fit in with that school story of good student a bit more, things might be easier for them. There might be less testing, fewer scoldings, more possibilities for them to be seen as the creative, thoughtful children they were. I inquired further into why I was drawn to respond in this way, gently trying to make Bob and James over into something closer to the image I held of a good student. I recalled my story of being 10 years old and in Grade 5, living a cover story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) as a good student, while leaving my homework undone and eventually cheating on tests (see chapter 1).

Was I hoping to have Bob and James attempt to live cover stories as good students? I was not aware of hoping for this, but I remember Carr's (1986) concept of narrative coherence, and it makes me wonder. Was I searching for a narrative coherence with my story to live by as a student who could appear to be one thing while also being another? My story to live by as a girl included playing in the barn, reading endlessly, making houses in the forest, and being the fastest runner in Lakelands. By living a cover story at school, allowing myself to be storied as a good student (while challenging this image in small secret ways like the undone homework), I could have the freedom to pursue my own story to live by, to be who I wanted to be off the school landscape. Did I wish James and Bob could sustain their stories to live by while at the same time creating cover stories as good students? Could I have been "engaged in living out a story of who [I] was, a story [I] had been telling and retelling since [I] was a child in school" (Huber, Huber, & Clandinin, 2004, p.188)? Trying to understand why I responded as I did to James and Bob in these moments, I wonder if I was unknowingly searching to achieve narrative coherence in my stories to live by.

Was I, then, living responsibly as a researcher in these moments with Bob and James? Although I knew I wanted to live a story of fidelity to persons (Noddings, 1986) as a researcher, it was not always clear to me how I could best support James, Bob, Fareda, or Julie. In inquiring into these moments, I could see myself being drawn to make Bob and James over into good students, yet I did not try to do so very persistently. Both boys chose not to attend to my proposals about changing the scribed story or erasing the word "NOTHING" from a worksheet, and I did not suggest such actions again. Bakhtin's (1984) words, "What self is answerable to is the social environment; what self is answerable for is the authorship of its responses" (pp. 67–68), help me consider my responses to the boys as attempts to be responsible to encourage each child to author his own story, not to author his story for him. Oyler's (1996) metaphor of the dance returns me to the notion that these were not the moments for me to *lead the dance*. Instead, in *attending to* the dance, as each child composed his own story to live by, I was endeavoring to live responsibly as a researcher, in the ways I understand the concept of responsibility.

My responsibilities as a researcher extended outside our lunchtime book group and my individual conversations with children. Returning to James, the child who was being moved to the learning strategies classroom for Grade 2, I thought it was important to slow down and consider this move carefully. I shared stories of James's thoughtful contributions in our lunchtime book group, and talked about his keen interest in reading *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997–2000) and other books with Laura and Jeanette. I felt a responsibility to do my best to ensure that others saw what I could see of James's strengths, so they would pause as they went about testing him and placing him in the learning strategies classroom, so they might see for a moment what I saw in James. I felt a similar responsibility to find ways to talk with Bob's teacher and others about what I was coming to know of his strengths, his creativity and facility with language. While Bob did not write much in our time together, I saw possibilities for him to be inspired to write through the excitement and great interest he showed in rocks and other topics with which he engaged.

Was I living responsibly as I talked with Laura, Jeanette, and other school staff about the ways I was coming to know Bob and James in our conversations? I saw this as part of the ethic of caring (Noddings, 1986) with which I tried to live in my relationships with each child. Because I cared (and care) deeply about each of these children, I tried to encourage the school staff to "institut[e] the conditions for the kind of present experience which has a favorable effect upon the future" (Dewey, 1938, p. 50). The futures in question, that of Bob and that of James, will be greatly affected by their experiences of being storied as marginally successful or unsuccessful students. The likelihood that these experiences will have a favourable effect upon the futures of Bob and James seemed to me to be quite small. For this reason, I attempted to tell my stories of Bob and James as creative, talented and intelligent, whenever I had the opportunity.

James, Bob, Julie, and Fareda each placed a great deal of trust in me over the course of our time together, first in the lunchtime book group and in classroom activities, and later, as we met for conversations as I brought back my writing to share with them. They trusted that I would *lead the dance* in ways that helped them think about and retell their stories to live by, perhaps restorying the lives they were imagining for themselves. I looked for ways to *dance with* each child, as we engaged in conversations about books and about our lives. They trusted I would try to world-travel (Lugones, 1987), not judging them but standing alongside each of them to see the world from their perspectives, *attending to the dances* they were composing. I felt deeply the responsibility to create this kind of space with each of them. Although I do not imagine I was successful in doing this all the time, I found moments when we were in that space, moments when possibilities for understanding more about oneself were realized, for the children and for me. Images drift through my head as I write this sentence: Julie pointing out the similarities between the kitchen of *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996) and her Gookum's kitchen; Fareda telling me excitedly about the beautiful night sky in Pakistan; James imagining himself as a knight in the illustration of a large medieval castle in a book we shared; and Bob leaning against my arm, telling me softly of the pearl his mother gave him for his rock collection.

Slipping In and Out of Intimacy With My Participants

The tensions I experienced during my first year at Ravine Elementary School (2002–2003) often seemed to be around the bumping of my coming to know of the children's stories to live by against the ways they were being storied by others on the school landscape. I began to see the children big in the way of which Greene (1995) writes, "in close contact with [the] details" (p. 10) of each child's life, "and with particularities that cannot be reduced" (p. 10). I wrote pages and pages of field notes each day after my hours at the school, filled with my reflections around such wonders as what Julie said that day, how Bob loved using the camera, why Fareda seemed so sad that day, or how James knew so much about animals of the desert. I was, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) phrase it, "fall[ing] in love with [my] participants" (p. 82), as I spent at least three mornings a week alongside the children, and began to move into close relationships with them. I was puzzled when I found that others on the school landscape were not seeing these students big as I was.

In the following school year (2003–2004), I found that as I spent more time at my computer, across the country from the school, and less time with the children, the tensions I pulled forward were more about me as researcher and teacher, and in relation with each child. Was I doing the right thing? Was I living up to the trust he/she placed in me? Was I able to be awake to the seed a child might plant in conversation? What did it mean to be responsible as a researcher? I wondered about this shift in the ways I was thinking about my experiences with the children. Was it in part that I was thinking and writing more about the children from far away, as I lived across the country, and came to the school less often? In the first year, much of my writing was in the field texts, immediately after my days at the school. In the second year, my context shifted, as I sat at my computer, far from Ravine School, reading and re-reading the field texts, reconsidering the children's words and my responses.

"Falling in love, slipping to cool observation" is a heading in *Narrative Inquiry* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81), in the chapter about field texts. Narrative inquirers "must become fully involved…with their participants, yet they must also step back and see their own stories in the inquiry, the stories of the participants, as well as the larger landscape on which they all live" (p. 81). Was I slipping to cool observation as I sat at my computer, only to fall in love all over again each time I returned to the school? When I read this chapter of *Narrative Inquiry* several years ago, I noted in the margin of that page that I was not sure about the cool observation. Would I be able to "slip in and out" (p. 82) of intimacy, to be reflective about the experiences I was having with the children at the school? From my perspective after having lived this research study, I realize I did, in time, move to cool observation, perhaps helped by the changing context, as I moved far from the city where Ravine School was located.

Reconsidering Earlier Stories

As I wrote and reflected on the ways my knowing of each child caused me to understand each of them and myself from multiple perspectives, I began to reconsider some of the stories I wrote in chapter 1, retelling them in different ways. My story of my memories of myself as a Grade 5 girl took on other shades of meaning as I laid it alongside the tension I expressed in chapter 3 around the moment when Bob wrote "NOTHING" on his worksheet, and my wonders about responsibility to Bob and James earlier in this chapter. This retelling of my own stories added an unexpected layer of understanding to my research, as I had not realized I would turn again to these moments in time. This was in spite of my careful attentiveness to working within the three-dimensional inquiry space "not only with our participants but also with ourselves" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 61). The layers of this narrative inquiry have continued to present themselves, often surprising me with their intensity, as they call on me to shift and reshape my story to live by in small but powerful ways.

Julie

When I retold the story of Julie and her perseverance in trying to stay at school for lunch in Grade 1, I began to understand more of her story to live by as it bumped against the school story of who could and who could not eat lunch at school. I kept thinking of Julie, long after the fall of 2002 when I observed most of the lunchtime stories with Julie unfolding. I wondered if she was striving for narrative coherence in her attempts to stay at school for lunch. Her story to live by as a self-reliant five year old, capable of making her own decisions about whether or not to stay for lunch, did not fit well with the school story of who could stay for lunch and the rules about how to obtain permission to eat lunch at school. I began to see traces of familiar plotlines in my story of Calvin, of whom I wrote in chapter 1. Looking back, I can imagine something of Calvin's story to live by, as a child who was a fluent Dene speaker, capable of independence in multiple ways at home, and adept in wood chopping, ptarmigan hunting, and perhaps ice fishing. How his story to live by must have bumped against my school story of active, engaged learners! My story was one which would have seen him busily working at the various tasks I designed in the Grade 2 classroom, far removed from his life of visiting the trapline with his grandfather and being outdoors much of the day every day.

Calvin could speak very few words in English and I could speak even fewer in Dene, and he did not do the work the others did in class, sitting quietly looking out the window. As a new teacher, unable to understand what I perceived as resistance to my instruction, I pushed Calvin to join the class activities. Finally, in frustration, he beat the walls of the classroom with his small fists and left. Recalling Carr's (1986) discussion of the need each of us experiences for narrative coherence, I begin to realize how the gap between Calvin's story to live by and my new teacher story of how we engage in school, happily moving from one learning centre to the next, caused a fairly significant tension for Calvin as he struggled to achieve narrative coherence in the classroom. Looking out the window was perhaps part of that search, as he was able to glimpse the trees, the lake, and the birds flying by, things that may have helped him feel a continuity with his story to live by.

The tension became too great, however, as I wanted Calvin to move away from the window and engage in the activities of the class. Dewey (1938) said the principles of continuity and interaction are not separate from one another. The principle of continuity means that something is carried over from earlier situations to later ones. "As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts" (p. 44). In the interactions Calvin had in the situation of this classroom, I suspect he found very little continuity with his experiences outside of school. As he moved into the classroom situation, I wonder if he felt his world contracting to the point that it was no longer recognizable, and the only way he could find to sustain narrative coherence was to leave that situation, to get out of that classroom.

When I wrote of Calvin in chapter 1, I did not consider how a tension caused by a need for narrative coherence may have forced him to leave the classroom. In seeing my story of him from this perspective, I can better understand how significant this leaving was for Calvin as he was engaged in living out a story of who he was, a story that was shaped over and over by his experiences off the school landscape. His story to live by bumped against the school story he encountered in my classroom, and was interrupted by that school story. I wonder how Calvin's story to live by was shifted by that tension and his response, as he perhaps created plotlines of non-attendance at school, plotlines that would shape his future in multiple ways.

James

James reminded me of the children in my master's research who showed compassion and caring when one little girl told a story of her father leaving home. This is a story I told in chapter 1, and one of the things that caused me to shift my focus, in that study, toward Noddings's (1992) notions of caring and how we might encourage caring in schools. Despite the challenges James faced in school, where he was storied as having learning difficulties, he was able to show caring and empathy for others. For example, James and a friend helped a Kindergarten child who fell at recess, and he was able to empathize when Charlene told a small group of children how her mother had left her and her family (Field notes, October 15 &16, 2002). I could see these qualities were part of James's story to live by because in our conversations together, I was able to see him big (Greene, 1995), to see the details and particularities of how he lived in school. As a researcher alongside James, over time I began to know some parts of his story to live by.

As my mind drifts back to Calvin and my first year of teaching, I wonder how I might have lived alongside that young boy in ways that were more like how I lived alongside James. If I could have slowed down enough to see him big, in the ways that Greene suggests, to come to know some of the particularities that were part of who he was and who he was becoming, might I have been able to attend to his telling of his stories to live by? This would have required me to understand curriculum as composed of more than the mandated outcomes listed in the government document, as something students and I construct together. It would have required me to set aside my desire to deliver the outcomes using the best practices I learned in my teacher education program the year before. It would have required that I begin to consider the four curriculum commonplaces (Schwab, 1970); teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu, and to realize that I was mostly, at that point, thinking about teacher and subject matter. The importance of attending to the milieu, a federal school in a Dene community in northern Canada, a context far away from my experiences as a student and a pre-service teacher in rural Nova Scotia, was not something I fully comprehended in those first years of teaching. The significance of the learner, Calvin, and finding ways to invite him to bring his story to live by into the curriculum making of our classroom, was something I would not understand for many years to come.

Living alongside James and the other three children as a researcher caused me to return to my story to live by as a teacher, to think about how I lived plotlines of authority over students, when I thought I had been teaching in child-centred ways that encouraged a sharing of authority. I was intent on providing choices for students in the classroom, through learning centres, but those choices were within a range authorized by me. Oyler's (1996) metaphor of the dance, as she explores a teacher's continually negotiated sharing of authority with students, encourages me to bring forward the ideas I explored earlier in this chapter, around what it means to be a responsible researcher. As a new teacher in Calvin's classroom, I was mostly *leading the dance*, not yet able to *dance with* students, as attention to the curriculum commonplaces of learner and milieu would help me begin to do. I was not yet able to *attend to* the students' own dances unfolding, to perceive Calvin's dance as a child who loved the outdoors, who spoke Dene, who perhaps was very close to his family, and whose strong cultural story was a central part of his story to live by.

Moving through time to the present, and my work as a teacher educator, I carry with me wonders about how to negotiate these dance steps with the pre-service teachers I now work alongside, how to attend to the four curriculum commonplaces in our courses, and how to encourage pre-service teachers to consider their own dances with students in classrooms where they will teach. I will address these wonders in the next chapter, where

I look to moments with each of the four children and consider them from my perspective as a beginning teacher educator.

Fareda

Fareda conducted an intense inquiry into who she was as a girl living in Canada but with many memories of a home in Pakistan, and a possible return to Pakistan looming large in her story to live by. As she talked with me, I found much to wonder about in her retelling of stories from her life in both countries, one so far from the other. Fareda had a home in both places, and over the two years we were in conversation, seemed to be working toward creating a story to live by that could encompass both those worlds.

Recently I began to recognize in my own life some of the same struggles in which Fareda was engaged. I lived in western Canada for much of my adult life, as well as spending some years in Nova Scotia. In deciding to accept a position at a university in eastern Canada I asked myself, as I imagine Fareda did, where did I belong? What does it mean to *belong* in a place? I "awaken[ed] to the complexity of living a life in between two [home places]" (Li, 2005, p. 26). Li wrote of no longer feeling at home in either Canada or China, as she moved between those two home places, composing stories of "migration, displacement, and search for home" (p. 26). This resonated with me as I became increasingly at home in Nova Scotia but continued to return to western Canada and to Ravine Elementary School to visit the four children who participated with me in this work, and my friends and the places I love there. Whenever I was in the west, I missed my family and home in Nova Scotia, and conversely, I wished to be "out west" after being in Nova Scotia for some time. The book *A Gift for Gita* (Gilmore, 1998) seemed to provide Fareda with ways to talk about her shifting stories to live by as a girl who lived in Canada but returned to Pakistan for visits with family, composing a story to live by that included two home places. Similarly, I believe thinking and writing about Fareda's identity-making helped me to imagine myself as having a story to live by that includes more than one home place. It's not that I have it all figured out, any more than Fareda does. Li finds she and her research participants "no longer feel at home when we return to our home country and it will take us quite a while to feel somewhat at home in this new country" (p. 26). Fareda and I will both miss the place we are not in at the moment sometimes, I suspect, and wonder what life would be like if we were there.

Always Becoming

I return to an idea I engaged with in chapter 1, that I am always becoming (Vinz, 1997), my knowing is partial and my stories to live by are gradually shifting as I tell and retell narratives of my experience. In writing about how I saw Julie, Bob, Fareda, and James engaged in the work and play (Lugones, 1987) of creating and recreating their stories to live by, I too found ways to understand *my* identity from different perspectives, moving toward *becoming* in new and sometimes unexpected ways. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) raise the possibilities that exist in "confronting…ourselves in our narrative past [which] makes us vulnerable as inquirers because it makes secret stories public" (p. 62). In chapter 1 I wrote that this "vulnerability is worth it for me, I think, because it carries the promise of a fuller knowing of my own subjectivity" (p. 18). I begin to see now that this process unfolds over time, not ending after I write a chapter or a piece, but continuing as I tell and retell stories of new and old experiences, from the different vantage points they provide when I place them one alongside another.

The learning in which I have been immersed has been about Julie, James, Bob, Fareda, and about myself. I am grateful to be able to say this out loud. I felt after writing my master's thesis an uncomfortable sense that although I was writing about the children in the research, I and my own deepening understanding of the book conversations in which we were engaged, as well as my own work in imagining who I am as a teacher, kept popping up. I couldn't seem to get myself out of the picture. I am learning that self-discovery is an important part of a narrative inquirer's research journey, and that has been a vital and revitalizing finding for me.

Chapter 8: Moving into Teacher Education

In this chapter, I look at the ways I came to know each of the four children in the lunchtime book group, and reflect on how this knowing has affected my work as a teacher educator. In my move into a position as a beginning teacher educator, I found myself carrying the faces and voices of Bob, Julie, Fareda, and James and their classmates into the university classrooms where I spend my days with pre-service teachers. The following are three organizing questions for this chapter, questions I explore in relation with each of the children I came to know in the lunchtime book group at Ravine Elementary School: How does the process of retelling and reliving moments with these children change me as a teacher educator? How do my stories of these children shift the ways I work and live alongside my students in the elementary language and literacy courses I teach? When I spend time in schools and classrooms where pre-service teachers are in the midst of field experiences, what stories to live by am I drawing upon as I look for spaces to engage in conversation that will move each of us, pre-service teachers and teacher educator, to consider and bring forward our personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) as teachers?

Bob: Making Space For Tensions

Moments I spent with Bob help me think about the importance of dwelling with tensions in classrooms, not pushing them under the carpet. In chapter 3, I recounted how, in May 2003, Bob wrote, "NOTHING" on his worksheet in response to the question asking him what he had learned after the colour mixing experiment with jello. I realized, as I wrote about this moment, how conflicted my position as a researcher was. I wanted Bob to change his answer, to write something more acceptable, to conform to the plotlines of a good student in school. Retelling this story, in my writing and in conversations with other researchers and friends, I learned about how hard it is for me to challenge the dominant story of good student/good teacher that lives in the institutional narrative of school as a system for producing obedient, rule-abiding citizens. I also realized how important it is for me to keep trying, because each time this story is questioned there is the possibility that children, youth, families, teachers, and administrators who live in tension with this institutional narrative may have a little more space to live their own stories on the school landscape.

This learning has been significant in relation to the teacher education milieu in which I now find myself. Bob's words, *I learned nothing*, are with me as I plan my courses and endeavour to shape course experiences that are engaging, educative, and hold possibilities for pre-service teachers to learn more about themselves as teachers, coming from complex and diverse backgrounds. I attempt to avoid course experiences that ask for one correct answer, or that reduce teaching to a technical, formulaic job. This is not as straightforward an undertaking as I might have imagined. Britzman (1986) reminds me that several cultural myths surround teachers, effectively creating an institutional narrative around what it means to be a teacher, and, by extension, what it means to be a teacher educator. The myth that "the teacher is the expert" (p. 448), seems to flourish still today, causing students to look to me as an expert in the subject area of literacy and to help make them into experts in that subject too, and quickly! Another myth, that of the teacher as “self-made” (p. 448), or “rugged individual[s]” (p. 453), needing to exert tremendous individual effort to be successful, works to negate the importance of context, social, historical, racial, economic, political, and other contexts. “For the rugged individual, any context—be it history, race, class, sex, or society—is viewed as a mere handicap to be individually overcome” (p. 453). In asking pre-service teachers to think about their own personal practical knowledge, which arises out of the very specific contexts of their lives, I have begun to experience some tensions occurring.

I am just beginning to imagine who I am and who I might become as a teacher educator. Yet already I see glimpses of myself in the writings of teacher education researchers such as Hinchman and Oyler (2000), who write of “finding irony in our teaching methods” (p. 495). In searching for ways to face up to the “contingency of [their] most central beliefs and desires” (Rorty, as cited in Hinchman & Oyler, 2000, p. 497), these teacher educators found ironies in the ways their own teaching identities and their attitudes toward their students sat alongside each other. They wanted to encourage students to move away from the desire for a recipe, a step-by-step process that would work every time in the teaching of social studies, reading, or other subjects in school. Yet students resisted this move toward uncertainty, and Hinchman and Oyler found themselves “comfortable critiquing [their] students’ insistent begging for ways to organize content coverage across a variety of instructional situations” (p. 497). They explored the irony of this stance, as they wanted students to embrace uncertainty and simultaneously meet demands that “our students’ knowledge match our own” (p. 498).

This led to "a dichotomy between 'us' and 'them'" (p. 496), as students struggled with these expectations. This sounds all too familiar, as the following account illustrates.

One of the elementary language and literacy courses I teach is taken by students in their last term before graduating from the program. In that course, one focus is on developing authentic, ongoing forms of literacy assessment in elementary classrooms. In the winter 2005 term, I worked with another faculty member to plan across our two courses, the language and literacy course and an integrated curriculum course. We found ourselves in a situation where students and we struggled with the ways we had planned one of the course assignments. We asked students to read and talk about portfolio-making as one means of assessment. Following the work of Lyons (1998), we also asked students to begin to create portfolios themselves and to continue that process throughout the course, working with one another to inquire into the meanings behind the artifacts they chose to include in their portfolios, through conversations with us and with a partner from the class. Lyons found that "through the … comments and reflections on the portfolio process itself, these new teachers were articulating the meaning of their experiences" (p. 107). It was my hope that students in the course might begin to do just this, to learn more about their own teacher knowledge and to see the value in working with the portfolio process in their own classrooms someday.

Part way through the course, one person came to us and said very respectfully that a number of students wanted to change their final assignment to move away from the portfolio work, as they felt they had spent enough time looking inward. While wondering about the import of these words, we were open to this, and asked the whole class for other possibilities, things that they felt would be educative for them. Students suggested a variety of ideas, most of which revolved around what I would consider more traditional projects, such as creating an author study or a series of lessons around a theme, such as exploration.

I was dismayed to find that these students were not interested in pursuing the portfolio process more deeply. I, like Hinchman and Oyler (2000), was dissatisfied with the "heavily stepwise instructional solutions that our students seemed to crave" (p. 495). I was not sure I wanted to hear them telling me, in ways perhaps more subtle than Bob's, that they felt they were learning nothing. I would have preferred, in some ways, not to know the discontent they were feeling, not to know what they were really thinking. But Bob helped me begin to see that students need to have a way to say what they think, even when it creates some tensions among us.

Hollingsworth (1994) lived a feminist pedagogy through collaborative conversations with teachers and described aspects of that pedagogy that I hope to bring to the teacher education classroom. These include "connected conversation, self-evaluation…shared agendas, and a valuing of…conversation as a pedagogical tool to develop our autobiographies, our personal theories and interests in teaching and learning, and the course curriculum" (p. 209). In the incident above, in some ways, I might have preferred to avoid the discomfort of knowing what the students were thinking. At the same I welcomed this knowing, because I tried and continue to try to create spaces for curriculum making that involve students as well as me in an ongoing, connected conversation about course experiences.

My colleague and I were facing a dilemma, one of voice, as we attended to the voices of the students, not wanting to silence them by imposing our story of what an appropriate course assignment should involve. Like Clandinin, Davies, Hogan, and Kennard (1993), we wanted to find a middle ground in terms of a final assignment that would be a result of attending to the voices of the students in the class. Like these teacher researchers, we were ready to renegotiate. "In collaborative evaluation, one voice does not carry more authority than another. We now see this view of multiple voices in evaluation as reflected in our renegotiation of the assignments" (p. 213). As we took the students' suggestions and worked with them to develop an alternative final assignment, I felt we were attending to students' voices and finding a way to live as teacher educators that did not privilege one voice above another.

However, I continued to feel some tension when, after our discussion, we changed the final assignment to include the options students brought forward. Britzman's (1986) work on the pervasive cultural myth of *teacher as expert* float back to me as I remember the tensions I experienced during the last days of the course. I continued to wonder about the new final assignment which seemed to be moving perilously close to being a show and tell of teaching strategies, devoid of any context. We had asked that students consider and articulate how their author study or other project would sit alongside the four curriculum commonplaces (Schwab, 1970), teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu, but in the days immediately before the project was due, students began to talk about how this part of the assignment did not make sense to them. We talked further in class about how students might incorporate their thoughts about their project in relation to the commonplaces into the final assignment. In reading the assignments, I found that this part of the project received little attention.

I am not sure what students learned in completing this assignment, and I am afraid some *did* learn nothing. On the other hand, I cannot be sure they would have learned more doing the portfolio assignment. I realized, in retelling the story of Bob and the Jell-o experiment, that being awake to creating spaces where students' voices can be attended to is something I value. But in the teacher education class, was I able to give up my position as the one who knows, to accept and learn from the ways the course was changed because of the renegotiation of the final assignment? Was I able to dis-position myself, as Vinz (1997) suggests, to "give up present understandings (positions) of [my] teaching to make gaps and spaces through which to (re) member [myself]" (p. 139)? Is the myth of *teacher as expert* a sacred story (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) that competes with the story to live by that I am composing? Bob's words and face were in my mind each day as I tentatively entered that classroom space and began to compose a new story of who I was as a teacher educator.

Julie: Making Space for Cultural Identities

In Grade 1, Julie was so proud of her mother, and told me her mother created several of the books we read together. I had the sense from Julie that she felt her mother could do anything. Julie seemed proud of her Cree cultural identity, repeatedly reading *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996) and finding connections with her grandmother and her house on a reservation outside the city. Julie called her grandmother Gookum, the

Cree word for Grandma, and smiled at my attempts to say this word correctly. Julie created a story of taking the other three children from the lunchtime book group to her grandmother's house to play. She was very interested in books I brought in by Aboriginal authors and illustrators, and in *Caribou Song* (Highway, 2001), spent time exploring the Cree words on each page. Julie seemed to seek out space in our conversations together to consider the cultural threads woven throughout her stories to live by.

As the only Aboriginal child in the class, and one of a small number in the school, I wondered if Julie would be able to hold on to the strong sense of her cultural identity. By the end of Grade 2, when I was seeing Julie only infrequently, she wanted to read *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996) one more time, but she referred to her grandmother only as Grandma, and did not respond to that aspect of the writing I was sharing with her in which I wrote about her stories of her Gookum. In multiple ways, Julie's culture seemed largely invisible on the school landscape. Having lived and been a teacher in northern Dene communities, I knew a school story of celebrating the Aboriginal culture of the community in the school, through the inviting of elders, parents, and community members into the school, not just for occasional visits, but in an ongoing way that integrated the knowing these people brought to the school with the knowing we as teachers and students brought. As well, teachers visited homes and families and did not remain separate from life in the community. The walls of the school, dilapidated as they were, were filled with representations of the cultural stories of the people of the community. Ravine Elementary, with its more diverse population, did not seem to me to celebrate Aboriginal culture in particular. Julie seemed to be looking for spaces to explore the cultural threads of her stories to live by in our moments together, but most of her days in school were not about that. How will this shape Julie as she grows? Over the course of her days in Grade 1 and Grade 2, did she begin to learn not to want to explore those threads?

What do I carry into my work as a teacher educator from my times with Julie? Through their field experiences, I have had opportunities to spend time in First Nations schools and in provincial schools alongside Aboriginal pre-service teachers. I wonder what school was like for these women, who attended provincial schools in an era when First Nations had not yet begun to take control of their education programs. Battiste (1998) finds that "the provincial curricula continue to disinherit Aboriginal languages and knowledge by ignoring their value. Underlying this neglect is the belief that Aboriginal languages and knowledge do not belong in the education systems" (p. 17).

As I carry Julie's stories with me, and lay them alongside the words of Battiste (1998), I wonder what experiences these pre-service teachers bring from their schooling that shape their personal practical knowledge as teachers. The "intergenerational narrative reverberations" (Young, 2003, p. 139) from these women's, and from all our, experiences are carried in "our bodies, in our memories, in our souls" (p. 139). How can teacher education begin to create a space to explore these reverberations? Young tells of how she and her research participants shared stories of "assimilation and how we were forced not to speak our languages and practice our culture" (p. 139). What stories might the pre-service teachers with whom I work tell?

I heard comments from several of these pre-service teachers about the "poor quality" of education in band schools; some of them spoke of their desire to do their field experiences in the provincial schools because of this. I wonder what they mean by poor quality. Battiste (1998) states "despite the awareness among First Nations educators that the provincial curriculum is culturally biased and inadequate...the federal government…required that the provincial curricula remain the foundation curricula" (p. 20) for the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey schools of Nova Scotia and for the First Nations schools of several other provinces. First Nations schools, then, are forced into the position of trying to meet curriculum outcomes mandated by the province, leaving Mi'kmaq curricula as an add-on, even in these schools. Is this why the pre-service teachers spoke of concerns of "poor quality" in the First Nations schools in their communities?

Perhaps these women learned a diminished sense of their culture in school, similar to what Julie might be learning. Do these pre-service teachers share with other Mi'kmaw educators "personal and social experiences…past and present…that have…discredited, marginalized, and silenced, as well as strengthened and affirmed…[their] Mi'kmaw cultural identities" (Orr, Paul, & Paul, 2002, p. 335). Most do their field experiences in the First Nations schools, and many find employment there when they graduate. How will the conflicting stories of First Nations schools as hopeful "sites of postcolonial education" (Battiste, 2004, p. 1) and of these schools as perhaps less-than-successful emulators of provincial schools affect the stories these pre-service teachers are composing for themselves? My conversations with Julie, my memories of reading *Red Parka Mary* (Eyvindson, 1996) with her, remind me to keep awake to these wonders.

Despite hundreds of years of assimilationist government policies and the "educational tragedy" (Battiste, 1998, p. 19) that has resulted, there lives a spirit of resilience.

> The Europeans took our land, our lives, and our children like the winter snow takes the grass. The loss is painful but the seed lives in spite of the snow. In the fall of the year, the grass dies and drops its seed to lie hidden under the snow. Perhaps the snow thinks the seed has vanished, but it lives on hidden, or blowing in the wind, or clinging to the plant's leg of progress. How does the acorn unfold into an oak? Deep inside itself it knows—and we are not different. We know deep inside ourselves the pattern of life. (Hampton, 1995, pp. 31–32)

I have glimpsed seeds of hopefulness in the First Nations schools I am privileged to visit. I saw spaces where the languages and cultures of First Peoples are not only visible and acknowledged but celebrated. Celebrating Aboriginal culture is not enough, Battiste (1998) reminds me. "The need is great for a *transformed education* that enriches our character and dignity, *that emerges* from one's own roots and cultural experience" (p. 22, italics mine). At least in some places, conditions seem ready for transformative education such as Battiste calls for to take shape. In what ways might this possibility shift and shape the stories of children who, like Julie, are looking for such spaces? How can I, working alongside *all* the pre-service teachers I am connected with, not only those of Aboriginal background, find ways to move toward a transformed education for First Nations students like Julie, to "enable the autumn seed" (Battiste, p. 16)?

Julie's strong connections with her mother and grandmother are another way I carry memories of her with me into teacher education. In chapter 4, I wrote about how Julie cherished the shoes her mother gave her, even when they were too small. Julie's stories often included her mother and her grandmother. For Julie, as for many children in her classroom, family was central in her stories to live by. Understanding this, making space to welcome families into schools and classrooms, sounds straightforward. But just as cultural myths exist around what it means to be a teacher (Britzman, 1986), there are also myths about what makes a good parent on the school landscape. Cairney and Munsie (1992) wrote of myths around parental involvement such as: some parents are not interested in their children's education; it is difficult to get parents involved; middle-class parents make better parents. These myths and others marginalize parents in relation to their child's schooling, particularly parents who are not middle-class. "This situation is heightened for Aboriginal parents, for whom the relationship with schools is at best exclusionary and at worst hostile" (Murphy & Pushor, 2004). For educators to move beyond the myths, Murphy and Pushor suggest world-travelling (Lugones, 1987) to parents' worlds. "Such traveling would require educators to enter Aboriginal worlds, to see Aboriginal parents through Aboriginal parents' eyes, to attend to Aboriginal parents' own sense of themselves from within Aboriginal parents' worlds" (p. 225).

In my teacher education class, pre-service teachers sometimes raise the issue of what to do about students who come to school with homework not done, supplies not bought, without breakfast, or who may have poor attendance. My thoughts drift to Julie, who was storied in some of these ways in school. When her parents' phone was disconnected, this was seen as an inconvenience to the school (Field note, May 1, 2003). In attempting to world-travel to the parents' world, I wonder how the phone disconnection was experienced by Julie's mother and stepfather. I wonder, too, how surprised they might have been to learn that the phone disconnection served to emphasize a disconnection already growing between home and school, from the school's perspective. It seems ironic that the loss of phone service, surely an annoyance to Julie's parents, could be turned into an inconvenience *to the school*. Whose phone was it? The myth of parent refusal to cooperate with the school was retold. "The assumption is that fault rests with the parent" (Murphy & Pushor, 2004, p. 225).

Pre-service teachers wonder, in class, how to find ways to bring parents and families to understand the importance of things like being on time, having a proper breakfast, or completing homework, perhaps beginning already to create a story of parents as deficit. I struggle to find a place to begin to think together with pre-service teachers about the complex ways that families interrelate and the ways family members have multiple, sometimes overwhelming responsibilities. Can we begin to world-travel together in class, to imagine schools from a parent perspective? Being able to live with uncertainty and complexity may be important for the teachers in my classes as they begin to work in diverse schools across Canada and other countries. Being flexible in relating with families, and building connections between school and home may be ways they can live alongside the students with whom they work. Remembering Julie's enthusiastic telling of how her mother wrote the book we were reading, or her stories of visiting her Gookum with the children from the lunchtime book group, I work to find ways to continue the conversation in the teacher education classroom around ways to invite families and family stories into the elementary classroom. I hope that we might "begin to imagine what other stories might be told on the landscape of schools if educators were to write parents' knowledge and parents' place and voice on the school landscape into their plotlines" (Murphy & Pushor, 2004, p. 229).

In a course I co-taught last year, we invited parents, children, and community members from the surrounding Aboriginal and African Canadian communities to speak with the class, to talk about experiences of connection or disconnection with schools. Julie's face and her voice in my memory helps me continue to search for ways to engage pre-service teachers in considering the complexities of inviting students to invite their families and family stories into the classroom, of moving beyond the monthly letters to parents and the phone calls home only when there is a problem. Inviting the speakers into our classes was one way to begin to make visible possible connections between families and schools. I continue to look for other ways to weave this idea more fully through the courses I teach.

James: Making Space for Different Learners

In chapter 6, I wrote of coming to know James as a thoughtful, creative six year old who enjoyed imagining himself into the books we read together. He was able to use his broad knowledge around topics of interest such as mummies or medieval castles to tell original stories and to embellish those I read to him. There was, however, another story of James, one which began on the first day of school in Grade 1. James was seen as having learning difficulties and was tested, medicated, and placed in a learning strategies classroom by his first day in Grade 2. James did have some differences as a learner. He had trouble sitting still in his desk or on the carpet, he took a long time tying his shoes, he found printing very challenging, and he sometimes cried when he was having a tough day. As a researcher in his classroom, and spending time with James in the lunchtime book group and one-to-one in conversations around the writing I was doing, I was privileged to see James big, in the manner of which Greene (1995) writes. Greene compares *seeing small*, a detached, systemic view of education, seeing students, teachers, and others on the school landscape from a distance as generals might see their soldiers on the battlefield, with *seeing big*, viewing each student, teacher, or other person in detail, seeing his or her own particularities. I saw the details of how James was learning in spaces where he could use his imagination and wit. Greene proposes, "It takes imagination on the part of young people to perceive openings through which they can move" (p. 14). I saw how James was bumping against the story of a good student as one who sits quietly and does well at pencil and paper tasks, and I began to hope that James could find the kinds of openings that Greene suggests. Will James find openings through which he can continue to compose his story to live by, not swallowed up by the school story of who he is?

Blair and Sanford (2004) conducted a two-year study of boys and literacy, finding middle school boys used a wide array of texts, including video games, books of the fantasy genre and other genres, sports magazines, the Internet, and computer games, to construct their own literacies. Traditional literacy forms, such as the pencil and paper tasks James struggled with, were sometimes "ignor[ed]…as boring, meaningless, and passive" (p. 459). Blair and Sanford's study revealed the need for planning and teaching that incorporates a "broadened definition of literacy [that] would benefit more students in more meaningful ways" (p. 459). James would benefit from a redefining of literacy that included the ways he interacted with non-fiction books and the ways he used media such as the Discovery channel (where he learned a great deal about ancient Egypt). James, younger than the boys Blair and Sanford worked with, was not yet storying school literacy activities as boring or meaningless, but I wonder whether this might happen as he grows older.

As I work with pre-service teachers, it is my thoughts of James that remind me that the pre-service teachers have their own ways of learning and of imagining who they are as teachers. At the same time, I attempt to make visible to these pre-service teachers the importance of considering each student in our elementary classrooms as having unique ways of learning and stories to live by. To attend to the diverse life stories of children in school is to begin to negotiate a curriculum of lives (Clandinin, Pearce, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Steeves & Murray Orr, in press). I wonder aloud about "how to become more attentive, as teachers…to how our stories of children shape…who they [are] and [are] becoming" (p. 37). I tell stories of children I have come to know over the years, like James, and ask the pre-service teachers in my classes to think about children they know well and the different ways they may engage in learning and in life. It is my hope that we remember to see children as more than a label, such as learning disabled. I ask students to look beyond the label and work to know one child more deeply and fully. Bateson (1994) reminds me we cannot "pass on hallowed certainties and maintain the status quo" (p. 8) as responsible teachers. Labels, or stories of students that are not open to the possibility of change, do not serve students well in a world full of uncertainty and rapid change. Bateson calls for open-endedness in our teaching, a willingness to improvise as we attend in multiple ways to a student's life unfolding. "We are called to join in a dance whose steps must be learned along the way, so it is important to attend and respond" (p. 10).

The other part of this work is exploring possible classroom structures and activities that encourage ways of coming to know children more fully. I ask pre-service teachers to hold the images of those children they know well in their minds when we read, talk about, and try out writing workshops, portfolio-making, literature circles, or other parts of a classroom literacy program, just as I hold my stories of James in my mind. I ask the pre-service teachers I work with to consider questions such as these: What possibilities would these provide for that child? What might make this challenging? Is there space in this activity for the child I know to bring in her or his own stories to live by?

In most classes, I am asked about how best to work with students with special needs, students who may be on individualized programs and may have a student program assistant assigned to them, students who, like James, are positioned differently on the school landscape. Linking this question to our work in coming to know students well, creating spaces for them to bring their whole lives into the classroom, helps me emphasize possibilities, rather than "hallowed certainties" (Bateson, 1994, p. 8) as we consider these students. "When children bring their lives into the classroom and we come to know those lives well, we cannot help but want to enrich them" (Calkins, 1991, p. 23).

Perhaps in cultivating an ongoing willingness to learn more about who our students are, as we come to know them over the many days we spend together on the in-classroom and out-of-classroom places of the school landscape, we may find multiple ways to engage with them in learning and in representing learning. Teachers "can watch students…listening to their rhythms and trying to learn both *from* them and *with* them" (Oyler, 1996, p.137). Moving beyond photocopied worksheets and the same old comprehension questions to allow students to share decision-making in how they represent their learning, is an improvisatory act (Bateson, 1994) that helps students feel "at home… to feel safe and respected and free to be themselves" (Calkins, 1991, p. 27) in our classrooms. When James shared with me his stories of life in a castle, he was showing me a most amazing representation of his learning about that topic. If he were asked to fill in a question and answer worksheet about castles, it would have provided a much more limited representation of his knowing. And it would not have helped him feel safe and respected, as this type of assignment was not one that suited James well as a learner at that point in time. Coming to know our students well and finding ways to help them to "live fully as themselves in our classrooms" (Calkins, p.12) is one way to consider how best to help students with special needs, and all students in our classrooms.

"Our first objective, then, is to fall in love with our children, and to do so quickly" (Calkins, p. 11).

Thoughts of James and the importance of attending to students' lives and their composing of stories to live by in our classrooms and schools helps me encourage pre-service teacher to draw on their personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Some of the pre-service teachers with whom I work are parents, and these people bring a richness to our classes in the ways they are able to see curriculum-making from other perspectives. Welcoming parent knowledge into our teacher education classroom is perhaps one way to begin to "create new stories in which parents are positioned in integral ways on the school landscape" (Murphy & Pushor, 2004, p. 228). Perhaps these pre-service teachers will invite parents to share their knowing of their children in classrooms where they teach. One woman in an elementary language and literacy course drew and wrote in a Venn diagram and included it in her portfolio, as a way to show how her knowing as a parent of two young sons and as a teacher overlap. Those who are not parents also have important personal practical knowledge which informs their teaching. One man has a brother with Down's syndrome, and he has talked with me about how he thinks about the literacy ideas we work with as he spends time working with this brother, helping him to read and write. He brings his awareness of different ways of learning into his classroom as a pre-service teacher and tries to find ways to create spaces for each student to enter into curriculum-making with him.

Beginning to look for this kind of knowledge in pre-service teachers with whom I work gives me a very different picture of each one than if I tested them to see who is most proficient in administering running records (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) or who can name and describe the stages of spelling development (Pinnell & Fountas, 2003), foregrounding the subject matter of instruction in literacy. Because of my conversations with and writing about James and the other children of the lunchtime book group, I try to keep us moving and thinking among the four curriculum commonplaces of which Schwab (1970) writes—teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu—in teacher education classes. When I ask pre-service teachers to write about a memory from their own school days, for example, they often tell vivid stories in which we can see the teacher and learner in the midst of a very particular milieu. Sometimes the memory includes a glimpse of the subject matter, sometimes it does not. We begin to realize that what we remember from our schooling is often not knowledge gained from textbooks or notes from the board (the subject matter), but from living in the midst of the four commonplaces. Dewey (1938) stated, "Books, especially textbooks, are the chief representatives of the lore and wisdom of the past" (p. 18), in traditional education. If pre-service teachers and I are working toward a valuing of the experiences of the teacher and learner within the milieu of school, problematizing the notion that subject matter *is* the curriculum becomes important. In course assignments, a focus on these four curriculum commonplaces enables me to see the strengths pre-service teachers bring to their work, as well as creating some spaces for them to explore something of their stories to live by as new teachers.

When students asked if we could move away from portfolio work, as I wrote of earlier in this chapter, when they asked if the course assignment could be something more traditional such as designing an author study, I realized we, pre-service teachers and I, are working amidst many tensions in our teacher education classroom. Temporarily we shift back to a more subject-oriented space, perhaps because it is too hard to keep looking at ourselves and our teaching against the backdrop of increased standardized testing and accountability across many school districts. Pre-service teachers are in vulnerable positions as they attempt to find work in school districts such as these. In terms of the curriculum commonplaces, how can I best help them negotiate the tricky milieu on the school landscape, while encouraging them to remain awake to teacher and learner as vital to curriculum-making? I am uncertain in my answer to this question, but in staying with it, perhaps pre-service teachers and I will improvise new stories to live by in this dangerous terrain.

Fareda: Making Spaces to Listen With Care

Fareda and her engrossment in the work of composing a story to live by that included homes in both Canada and Pakistan reminds me of the importance of place in the three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Coming from two very different homes, across the world from one another, provided Fareda with both dilemmas and joys. As our conversations, during lunchtime book group and individually, grew into spaces for her to explore this, she became quite focused in her time with me, immediately opening the talk with a story from either her home in Pakistan or her new home in Canada. Sometimes she would tell me of her worries that her family might move back to Pakistan. I found myself anticipating each conversation with Fareda, wondering what direction her self-study might take next. I felt like a companion on her journey, one who might occasionally hold a mirror for her while she engaged in the identity-making work she needed to do.

My knowing of Fareda helps me as a beginning teacher educator in several ways. Her strong need to think through her sense of what home means to her is with me as I work with pre-service teachers who are facing relocations as they are hired for teaching positions in various places throughout Canada and the world. In rural Nova Scotia, with its gradually declining population, it is almost inevitable that new teachers will have to leave their community, either for other locations in the Maritimes or more likely for other provinces, territories, or even for other countries. This is the story I lived 20 years ago as a new teacher. While pre-service teachers know this as they enter the B Ed program, it is still often a difficult aspect of their final term, as they come face-to-face with leaving to make a new home elsewhere. Li's (2005) wonders about the "complexity of living a life between two [places]" (p. 26) float through my head. As I come alongside these pre-service teachers in classes and field experiences, I am aware of trying to listen with care to what they say of their tensions and their concerns about shifting home places. I hear in their words echoes of Fareda's concerns about leaving grandmothers and other family members behind and starting to make a life in a new place. I hear their excitement about beginning this new adventure mixed with regrets and feelings of loss. I remember my own uncertainty as I left Nova Scotia for Saskatchewan so many years earlier. While I can do little to help them, perhaps I can be a companion, as they consider reshaping their stories to live by as they imagine new home places.

Another way in which my stories of Fareda come with me into teacher education is through my memory of being told that Fareda was such a quiet child, that she would not be appropriate to invite as a member of the lunchtime book group because she would have little to say. Fareda did, of course, have much to say, as I found out when I listened over time and with care to her stories. As with some of the other things I am learning from attending to the children in my research, I find this memory connects on two levels to my work as a teacher educator. First, some of the pre-service teachers with whom I work begin the program very quiet, not speaking often during class or in the out-of-classroom spaces in our program. It can be difficult to gain a sense of their hopes and dreams, their concerns and tensions, as pre-service teachers. Finding ways to listen with care to these students, to be alongside them as I tried to be alongside Fareda, without big expectations or agendas, seems to provide spaces for some to begin to think and talk about their emerging stories to live by as new teachers. I am privileged to see the hopeful and thoughtful ways in which these pre-service teachers are imagining themselves in classrooms of children. In these moments, I glimpse some of the best parts of being a teacher educator.

Possible ways of coming alongside a pre-service teacher, ways into the conversation, are multiple and shifting. With Fareda, finding the book *A Gift for Gita* (Gilmore, 1988) and sharing it with her provided an opening for us to delve into her emerging stories to live by. With the pre-service teachers, sometimes a piece of children's literature I read in class will provide a space to begin with someone after class. Another time it may be a moment when tensions are high and someone needs to talk. Or it may be that something we discuss in class will touch a chord with someone and she or he will write me a letter, beginning a conversation that will unfold over months or even years. I am new to teacher education and am very much just finding my way, but when I am able to connect at this level with pre-service teachers, it is a good surprise. In my years of teaching elementary school, and in the research with Fareda and the other children of the lunchtime book group, I worked to listen hard and listen with care to students. This was one of my stories to live by as a teacher. In moving into teacher education, I am finding this thread beginning to show up again as a part of who I am and who I am becoming as a teacher educator.

A New Teacher Educator: Shifting Stories to Live By

Stories of each of the children with whom I was in conversation over the nearly two years at Ravine Elementary School challenged me, unsettled me, encouraged me, and inspired me as I began to compose my stories to live by as a teacher educator. Each child was striving for a narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) in her or his story to live by, and our conversations provided windows into the search in which each was engaged, enabling me to glimpse the tensions and the continuities in their stories to live by. At the same time, I too was seeking to achieve narrative coherence, first as a teacher researcher, then as a new teacher educator. Coming to know these four children through our research conversations provided a mirror for me as, alongside each one, I found myself inquiring into who I am and who I am becoming. I am beginning to understand teacher education as a space to continue the conversation, to engage pre-service teachers in inquiries, to keep at the work of composing our shifting stories to live by.

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